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A KING OF SHADOWS

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MARGARET YEO

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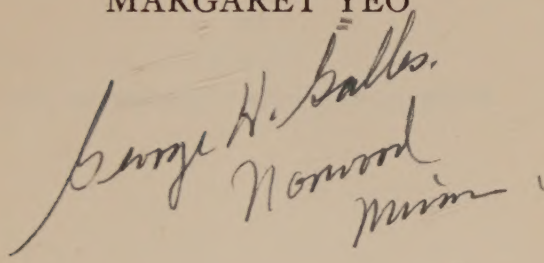
A KING OF SHADOWS

BY

MARGARET YEO



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PART I. SCOTLAND

JANUARY 16—FEBRUARY 4, 1716

A KING OF SHADOWS

CHAPTER I

A PRINCE OF DREAMS

Margaret Ogilvie woke with a feeling of happy anticipation, and lay curled snugly in the old fourposter, drowsily aware that it was very cold outside, that she was warm and comfortable, and pleasurably conscious of her young, strong, healthy body; then, through this sleepy sense of physical enjoyment came the realization, sharp as a sword-blade, blinding as a flash of lightning, of the reason for joy and excitement. To-day was Friday, January 16, 1716, and at eleven o'clock this morning James III and VIII, the rightful King, was to make his entrance into Dundee. For his ancestors her own had fought and died; for his father's sake her own lay in an exile's grave; to-day she was to see in the flesh her prince of dreams, hero of childhood's and girlhood's loyalties, living incarnation of the Stuart Cause, devotion to which had been born and bred in her. She jumped from bed, ran to the window and drew back the heavy curtains. The narrow winding street and the gables of the houses, nodding towards each other like old wives gossiping, looked unfamiliar in the dim white light reflected from the snow; the outlook had a strange air in the faint grey of the winter dawn, as if a wizard wand had transfigured the common things of daily life into something magic and enchanted.

The Celt in Margaret responded like a finely-strung lute to the glimpse of the unseen world which interpenetrates and underlies all material things, and some charmed note, as it were the call of an elfin bugle across the hills, set every nerve a-quiver, made her cheek flush and her heart beat faster under the homespun linen of her night-shift. Then, with a shiver, she realized that she was frozen, standing with her naked feet on the bare boards, and jumped back into bed. She groped for flint and tinder, lit one of the tallow candles that old Janet's economical Scotch mind considered good enough for bedroom use, and when it had spluttered and guttered itself into a clear flame she drew from under her pillow a broadsheet, printed in London two years before and containing a description of James Stuart written at Bar-le-Duc by Mr. Leslie. It was scarcely necessary for her to read it, for she knew every word by heart, but to-day she was to see the King, perhaps hear his voice, even kiss his hand, and she wanted once more to see in imagination, before she saw him in reality, the hero of her romantic dreams.

"And first for the Person of the Chevalier, which you desire to know": wrote the Rev. Charles Leslie, the famous non-juror and chaplain of the Protestant members of James's household: "He is Tall, Streight and clean-Limbed, Slender yet his Bones pretty large; He has a very graceful Mien, walks fast and his Gait has great Resemblance to his Unkell, Charles II. . . . He is very affable and has something strangely engaging in his Voice and Deportment, that none who ever conversed with him but are charmed with his good Sense and Sweetness of Temper. Nor can any take it ill when he grants not their Request for he always gives such a Reason as must satisfy."

Margaret laid down the paper. The thought that before another day dawned she might have heard that

"strangely engaging" voice and looked into the long hazel eyes so like those of his tragic ancestress, Mary Queen of Scots, made it impossible for her to stay quiet any longer.

Already the narrow oblongs of the casement windows showed grey with dawn, and hurriedly slipping on a warm gown of grey, home-carded wool, she ran into the next room, set the candle on the high mantel, and pulled back the curtains of the bed to look down on the mop of yellow hair which was all that was visible of her cousin.

"Elsie! Elsie!" she cried, "how can you go on sleeping when to-day the King comes to his own?"

Elsie pulled the blankets tighter round her, but condescended to open a pair of large eyes of forget-me-not blue.

"No king would get me out of bed on such a morn before it is light, mad Meg!" she laughed. "Come in and keep warm till Janet calls us."

"Not yet light!" scoffed Margaret. "Why, I can see right down the street. There is a man coming from the Market-Place. He is so muffled up that I cannot see his face, but he looks like. . . . Yes, I'm sure 'tis he turning down White Hart Street."

"Who?" asked Elsie sleepily.

"Alan Fraser," answered Margaret; then laughed as she put an arm about the shoulders of her cousin, who had jumped from bed and run to the window. "No king would get you out of bed in this cold, you swear, Elspeth, yet the mere mention of Alan is enough!"

The man's figure disappeared under an arch, and Elspeth laid her golden head against her tall cousin's shoulder, hiding the wild rose flush on her cheek in the mass of dark hair, but Margaret's voice sounded suddenly stern.

"Is not that arch the entrance of George Cameron's house?"

Elspeth lifted her head quickly.

"Cameron, the Hanoverian spy? Nonsense, Meg, for what should Alan go there?"

The entrance of Janet, the old nurse, broke the thread of their talk, and they did not meet again till they entered the dining-room, where Master Jock Forbes, W.S., Elspeth's father, was waiting to say a long grace before falling on the substantial breakfast of porridge, finnan haddocks, home-cured ham, towering piles of baps and scones, with a tall pewter tankard of foaming ale for himself and cups of steaming chocolate for the girls.

Master Forbes looked tenderly at Elspeth, who was the apple of his eye and the image of her dead mother—the sister of Margaret's father—then he cocked a twinkling eye at Margaret's untouched fish.

"Too excited to eat, lassie? Ye're ower full of dreams, like your father."

"So are you, Uncle Jock," she smiled back; "under your old legal parchments and great boxes of deeds you are as romantic as any of us."

"Nay, nay, my business is with *deeds*, not dreams," he chuckled; "but have a care, Meg, lest your prince prove but a sorry human fellow after all your dreams. Ye'll see him pass at eleven the morn, and he is to receive the Jacobite gentry this even at Stuart's of Gorntully."

Elspeth danced with excitement.

"Ye'll take us, Daddie?"

"Dinna fash yersel', my bairn; if the snow's not too deep and ye'll promise not to take cold, ye shall both come."

With a kiss on her forehead and a smile to Margaret he took his cloak and went on his way to the Town Hall,

where the municipal dignitaries were to receive the King.

Long before eleven Elspeth was dressed in her Sabbath best, with the fur-lined hood of a warm blue cloak drawn over her yellow curls, and was leaning from the open window of the dining-room, which, being on the first floor, gave the best view of the Wellgate. Janet came in, very stiff and erect, and shivered.

"Hoots, lassie! Do ye wish to kill us a' wi' cauld?"

"You're as excited underneath as any of us," teased Elsie, seizing her by the shoulders. "You've got on your Sabbath gown and the collar and cuffs of Valenciennes lace that Meg's father sent you from St. Germains."

Then Margaret joined them in her Sunday best of fine grey cloth, with collar and cuffs of snowy lawn, carrying in her hand a white rose nestling amid its green leaves. Both Elspeth and Janet gave an exclamation of astonishment till they touched it and found that its petals were cunningly fashioned of the softest white lace and the leaves of green silk.

"Did you think it was real?" Margaret laughed. "The lace was on my father's mother's gown when she made her curtsey to King Charles II at Scone sixty-six years ago; the silk was a bit of a dress of my mother's that I waxed to make it stiff and shiny."

"But it smells like a live rose!"

"Don't you remember, Elsie, last year at Glenisla we made scent out of rose-petals we dried from Aunt Mary's garden? The King shall have one white rose flung, for all our frost and snow."

" 'Tis shame to fling it, Meg; 'twill fall and be trampled in the snow."

"What better fate could any ask than to fall for a Stuart?"

"True, bairn," nodded Janet; "naught's too good for the King, God bless the puir laddie."

"Ye're a pair of daft Jacobites," laughed Elspeth, then turned and leant out of the window to receive a greeting from Alan Fraser which set eyes and cheeks aglow.

Margaret went to the other window and looked out. The frozen snow in the street crunched under the hurrying feet of the townsfolk, all bent for the Market-Place and Town Hall, sound Scots burghers, plainly but warmly clad in sober-coloured clothes, their wives muffled in big cloaks and hoods of homespun wool, most with pattens on their feet, while here and there the gleam of a high red heel or the rustle of a silken petticoat betokened an attempt at French fashions. Every now and then a group of horsemen trotted past, with jingle of bridle and scabbard, flash of gold lace and polished spurs; or a troop of Highlanders swung by, their bonnets pulled down over their ears, their bare knees red with cold, their plaids tightly wound round their shoulders—men from the battalions of Clanronald, Stewart of Appin, McClean, Glengarry, Glencoe or MacDougal.

All was bustle and expectation; if there were faces dour and discontented they were scarcely noticeable among the white-cockaded bonnets and eager loyalty.

Fraser's black horse with one white stocking fidgeted and curveted, bringing him under the window where Margaret and Janet sat.

"Are they soon coming?" asked Margaret.

"They were due at the Seagate half an hour ago but I wager the snow has delayed them. Listen!"

Through the icy air and the sparsely falling snowflakes came a distant roar of cheering.

Fraser doffed his bonnet gaily to Elsie and cantered off up the Wellgate, but Margaret had a queer fancy

that as the shouts of welcome had sounded his grey eyes had glinted like steel. But all thought of Fraser vanished as nearer and nearer swept the waves of cheering, while a foam of fluttering handkerchiefs and tossing bonnets heralded the coming of James Francis Stuart.

At the head of the toil-stained, war-worn, shaggy-haired Highlanders strode the pipers, and the wild skirl of pipes made a fiercely exultant accompaniment to the cries: "Long live King James VIII!" and "Welcome to yer ain, Jamie!" to the shrill hurrahs of the children, the choking sobs of emotion of many of the women. The snow began to fall in thick feathery flakes as the Jacobite cavalry came on the heels of the Highlanders—Scotsmen, Irishmen, Frenchmen, Englishmen, a few gorgeous in gold lace, scarlet and blue, on prancing satin-sleek chargers; others pinched, tattered and shabby from a bitter winter campaign, their mounts rough-coated, tangled of mane, with roughly mended harness. A space—then three riders came into sight, the one in the centre a horse-length or more ahead of the others. On the right rode the Earl of Mar, big built, heavy-jowled, in a suit of rich purple cloth and a great cloak lined with squirrel fur; on the left was George Keith, tenth Earl Marischal, small, slight, eager-faced, his worn blue coat the colour of his eyes. In the middle rode James III and VIII, *de jure* King of Great Britain and Ireland. Tall, slight, graceful, sitting his prancing horse as if he were one with it, clad in vivid scarlet, with a glitter of orders at his breast, he burned like a flame through the grey winter air and the fast-falling snow. His gold-laced hat with its scarlet feather was in his hand as he waved an acknowledgment of the loyal shouts, and the auburn curls of his heavy wig were powdered with snow. The wind had whipped a bright colour into the clear olive of his cheeks; his fine-cut red lips were parted; the sensitive nostrils quivered and the eyes were aglow—

in very truth a vision of lighted fire in a dull, dark world, a dream incarnate.

Men tore their white cockades from their bonnets and women theirs from their breasts to throw as he passed, for in this dour northern winter there was neither flower nor leaf to strew before the King as he came into his own. Then, as he drew abreast with Master Forbes's house, Margaret leant out and threw her white rose.

It fell on his horse's mane. He looked up, and for an instant that seemed to the girl an eternity the liquid hazel eyes caught and held hers. Then, as his horse moved on, he raised the rose to his lips and fastened it to the Garter Star above his heart.

For a moment Margaret's eyes were blinded with tears, then, as she drew back, her hair, too, white with snow, she met the laughing glance of a pair of amber eyes set in an olive face whose aquiline beauty came straight from imperial Rome, a reminiscence accentuated by the fact that the rider wore his own dark hair, short and gleaming against his small proud head, in contrast to the heavy curls of the other men's wigs. There was something arresting, challenging, in his glance, and Margaret watched till the King's scarlet figure on the black horse and the other, in the purple cloak, on a bay Arab mare, had vanished from sight down the Hurrygate.

CHAPTER II

DAVID AND JONATHAN

MASTER FORBES thawed his frozen hands and feet while he answered the girl's eager questions about the King's reception.

"There he sat in the saddle for nigh two hours in the Market-Place, with folk pressing round to kiss his hand or even touch his horse, and shouting all the while. Some of the old ones remembered his grandfather, the martyred Charles I, and one gey old man was there who had seen Montrose, noble as a stag at bay, walk to the scaffold for his rightful king sixty-six years ago."

"Did he see the King?"

"He is blind now, but his grandson led him to the Chevalier, who gave him his hand to kiss and spoke very sweetly to him. I could not hear the words, but the tears of joy from the blind eyes ran down the wrinkled cheeks and the old voice quavered: 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.' Whereat Master Green looked more than a little sour. Faith, what is it about the Stuarts that men, and women too, count it gain to lose all in their service? And now, lassies, to dinner, for I'm fair starved with cold."

"Uncle Jock," said Margaret, as Master Forbes carved the saddle of mutton, "you talk of His Majesty as 'the Chevalier,' yet are you no Hanoverian."

"If I were that, Meg, 'twould not be the courtesy title of Chevalier I'd give the lad, but the plain, ugly one of Pretender. I meddle not in politics. Let them that will

shout themselves hoarse for George of Hanover, and them that will lose their homes, their goods, maybe their very lives, for the Stuart cause."

"Yet your father fought in the Civil War for King Charles."

"And got naught for his loyalty but a crippled leg and still more crippled fortune."

"And your elder brother followed King James into exile as did my father."

Master Forbes laid down his knife and fork and fixed his grey eyes somewhat sternly on his niece.

"And would have been attainted, too, had he not died so suddenly. Think ye, lassie, it was for pleasure that I left the old home at Glenisla and studied law at Edinburgh, and have lived and worked all these long years in this dour town? Nay, there's something stronger than this strange notion of the Divine Right of kings, something deeper rooted than devotion to the exiled Stuarts and to what, if I mistake not, is their lost cause."

"And that, Father?" asked Elsie.

"The love of a man for his ain land, most of all for his ain piece of land, that his fathers have seen ploughed and sown and reaped, have ridden, shot, fished and hunted on for nigh a thousand years, and for the old house that has been the home of us all for over a score generations, and stands as grey and enduring as the granite hills about it."

The silence was broken by Elsie, whose large eyes brimmed with tears.

"And now there is none but me, and the old name will die."

He put an arm about her and smoothed the silky curls with his nervous, sinewy hand.

"Think not that I love thee more than a score of lads, my wean? Thy man shall take thy name, an he will, and

please God, I shall live to see thy sons carry on the old name, the old blood and traditions."

Margaret saw the red blood rush from chin to brow before Elsie hid her face against the grey frieze-clad shoulder, then she rose and left father and child together.

The drive that night was slow and silent, for the deep snow muffled the sound of hoofs and coach-wheels, but in the court of Gorntully was noise and bustle enough to satisfy the youngest and most ardent of Jacobites. Blazing torches threw an uncertain yellow glare on to the lumbering coaches that emptied their occupants on to the steps; smoking horses were being led away to the stables while their riders shook snow from their hats and cloaks, bonnets and plaids, under the archway. The air was filled with the chatter of French, the torrential rush of Gaelic, the soft caress of Irish brogue, the slow drawl of English and the good Lowland Scots.

As the Forbes coach drew up at the steps there cantered into the yard a bay mare with the fine head, liquid eyes and arched back of the pure Arab. When her rider dismounted and took her head between his hands she nuzzled into his neck with a soft caress, and Margaret recognized him for the owner of the amber eyes which had met hers so gaily as the King had passed. Standing at the top of the steps with Elsie, she noticed that his circular purple cloak was flung over his left shoulder like a Roman toga, that he wore high riding boots of fine scarlet leather; then, as he ran up the steps and snatched off his hat, she saw that the hair shone like polished bronze.

It was a battle to get into the banqueting hall, and once inside, the crowd was so great that it seemed impossible ever to get farther than the entrance. The scene was

one of barbaric splendour. Pine torches flared in iron sconces and cast wavering shadows on the stone walls from the heads of wild boars, wolves and stags. On the daïs at the far end a wide stone seat stood on a rug of wolves' skins laid on the rough axe-hewn boards; over the seat was flung a plaid of the royal Stuart tartan—the green of Highland hills, the white of untrodden snow, the vivid scarlet of loyal blood shed for the Cause. On the wall behind, the tapestry swayed in the draught till faint knights and faded ladies seemed blown through the misty forest of wintry trees by the breath of death. Margaret shivered; it was as if she felt the passage of something chill and dark, which dimmed the vivid life and stilled the gay talk to the remote and shadowy silence of "the land where all things are forgotten."

Then the crowd parted a little in front of her and she saw the tall figure standing on the daïs. James wore a coat of flame-coloured Lyons velvet, cut in the French fashion, with full stiffened skirts and wide cuffs turned back to show the fine lawn of his shirt and the ruffles of Mechlin lace. His long waistcoat was of cloth of gold, shot with flame; over one black silk stocking was the Garter, and the red-heeled shoes had large diamond buckles. On the green ribbon across his lace cravat hung the Order of the Thistle; Saint Andrew, the Golden Fleece, the Saint Esprit, the Golden Rose and a dozen other orders blazed above and below the sky blue of the Garter ribbon across his breast. Against the dim tapestry, the rough stone walls, the brown and grey of the wolves' skins he shone like a fairy dream of flickering flame and dazzling dew.

The loyal gentlemen of the neighbourhood and their sons—some awkward in unaccustomed finery—their wives and daughters tight-laced in their best gowns, each received an appropriate word and charming smile as they

passed before the daïs. John Erskine, eleventh Earl of Mar, stood behind his master as prompter, his heavy jowl a dull purply red, his small eyes flickering to and fro, sometimes throwing in a remark with a loud cheery laugh. Master Forbes and Elsie passed; then Margaret, her heart beating to suffocation, heard a sweet, slow voice speak her name.

"Mistress Margaret Ogilvie, since your father followed mine to exile and an exile's grave, may we not hope to share a common happiness in the future as in the past we have been fellow-sufferers? Often your father led me out as a child on my pony into the forest at St. Germains, and if I now have a good Scots seat in the saddle and light hands on the bridle, 'tis to him I owe them."

The slim white hand, with its burden of blazing gems, lay on hers. It was smooth and cool as running water under her lips; then, as she rose from her curtsey, her feet caught in the wolves' skin rug and she slipped on to her knees. The King had taken her by both hands and lifted her to her feet before anyone noticed the mischance.

"*Ma foi*, 'tis not the first time an Ogilvie has fallen in serving a Stuart," he smiled; then, seeing her scarlet blush of shame, he bent forward, with her hands still in his, and whispered: "Let not your cheeks turn traitor and don a red coat. We will not spare so fair and loyal an adherent."

As she stepped down from the daïs her eyes met his; his left hand went to his breast, and amid the blaze of orders she saw her white rose still resting against his heart.

Hot on Margaret's heels came the Bailie and his wife, she breathless from being laced into a silken gown, whose purple bodice creaked as ominously under the strain as the timbers of a storm-tossed ship. Her

apple cheeks shone even brighter at the King's smiling words; then her husband, tangling his sword in the rug which had been Margaret's downfall, measured his length at the King's feet, amid a roar of laughter, which echoed and re-echoed under the kingposts of the vaulted roof.

Lord Marischal and his younger brother, James Keith, were talking to Master Forbes and Elsie, and when the laughter brought Margaret back to outward things she met the glance of a pair of blue eyes which changed under their straight black brows from grave to gay as quickly as did the mobile face and femininely sensitive mouth from frowns to smiles.

"I remember your father very well, Mistress Margaret," said Marischal.

"And I scarce remember him at all," she answered; "you know my mother came home from Whitehall and died when I was born, and Father followed his late Majesty into exile without even seeing me."

"Did you never see him then?"

"But once, the year before he died, when I was six. He came back secretly to Scotland to settle his affairs with Uncle Jock, who since then has given me a home."

"You were sure not already *seven* when your father died?"

"I am indeed twenty-five now," laughed Margaret; "but a few months younger than His Majesty. An old maid, in good sooth."

Marischal laughed too.

"Then Scotsmen are bigger fules than I took them for."

There was a momentary silence in the talk, and through the hall floated the sound of a violin, played in an adjoining room. Margaret saw the King turn his head, listening, and look at the door as if watching for someone.

"The Ogilvie Lament," she exclaimed, as the notes grew louder.

"It's you should be singing to the violin," said Elsie.

"Faith," said James Keith, a tall slender lad of twenty, with his brother's eyes and mouth, "'twill not be my fault if an Ogilvie sings not her kinsman's lament. George, the Mackintosh is beckoning us."

Master Forbes had vanished in deep converse with a legal crony; Alan Fraser whisked Elsie to the seventh heaven by taking her to the recess by the wide stone hearth, and Margaret had a clear view of the King through the thinning crowd. The stream of presentations had ended; for a fleeting instant the mast of kingship and gaiety and duty slipped, laying bare the face of a weary, lonely and homesick boy. But suddenly the whole face lit up, the eyes glowed, the lips parted in a smile, as when a dying fire springs to renewed radiance. On to the daïs leapt a tall supple figure in a coat of peach-coloured silk laced with gold, and a silver waistcoat embroidered with roses, and by the short, gleaming hair Margaret recognized him for the rider in the purple cloak.

A gentle voice addressed her in French and she found beside her a man of middle age whom she had seen with Marischal. The dark grey eyes were friendly, though she fancied something penetrating in their gaze; the aquiline nose was well cut under the grey wig; the dress black, of a French cut, with ruffles of fine lawn at wrist and throat.

"Mademoiselle speaks French?"

"But yes, Monsieur."

"Mademoiselle will then permit me to present myself, M. de St. Etienne. I knew your father at St. Germains, a great gentleman and a good Christian."

"A Presbyterian, like the rest of us, Monsieur."

"But your mother was Italian, a kinswoman of the Queen's."

"And a Papist. That was why she would not marry Father for so long. He met her at Holyrood in 1681, when she was in attendance on the Queen, then Duchess of York, but she would not marry a Presbyterian. At last, in 1688, the Queen persuaded her, and they were married in the Chapel Royal at St. James's."

"So, like Jacob, he served seven years before he won his reward."

"Yes. She was with the Queen when His Majesty was born on June 10, 1688, then my father sent her home, because he said no son of an Ogilvie should be born out of sight of heather and sound of a Highland burn. The son he hoped for was *me,* and she died when I was born. I often wonder if she was not homesick for Italian skies and sunshine."

"And you?"

"I have never left Scotland."

"Yet you too are half Italian. The blood of Este flows in your veins, as in the King's."

"Have you forgotten mine, Monsieur?" said a deep, low voice in French, but with a faint accent that was unfamiliar to Margaret.

She turned, and again her eyes were held by those amber ones that looked almost black under the sweep of the long thick lashes.

"The King desires your presence," the speaker continued to Monsieur de St. Etienne, "to present you to . . . *Mon Dieu!* I cannot remember his barbarous name."

"Mademoiselle," bowed the Frenchman, "I leave you with less regret because I may present to you a kinsman of whose very existence you were probably unaware—Prince Piero d'Este."

He limped away, leaning on a stick, and the Prince kissed Margaret's hand, then his eye travelled over her, from the piled dark curls, crowned with the lace fontanges, to the full, looped-back skirt of hand-woven brocade, with gold melting to green, and green fading to the misty blue of distant sunlit hills. His gaze lingered on the necklace of square emeralds that shimmered on the whiteness of her breast, and he still held her hand in his when he spoke. She gave a little shiver; the clasp of the strong, slim brown fingers on hers, the gaze of his deep lustrous eyes, the flash of white teeth in the smooth olive of his face, a soft huskiness in the low voice, gave her a feeling she had never known before.

"*Per Bacco!* You are cold. Come to the fire. These northern winters—ugh! Surely hell is cold like this, and not hot."

"You have been riding in the snow."

"On the King's business. I saw you as we came into Dundee this morning, and again here on the steps, but I did not know then in what a generous mood the gods would show themselves by giving me such a kinswoman."

"But how are we related?"

"You know the Este pedigree back through Cesare, Duke of Ferrara and Modena, who married Virginia Medici? He was grandson of Alfonso I and Lucrezia Borgia. Your mother was a d'Este, akin to the Queen, so was my father, therefore we are akin. Never did I find logic so adorable!"

She laughed with him; there was something irresistible about his gaiety and *joie de vivre*.

"Then you and the King are cousins too?"

"But certainly. But we are more. We are friends—the most perfect in the world."

His face suddenly changed; the gay insouciance, the

insolent youthful charm was replaced by a passionate and tender devotion, then the little silence was broken by James Keith.

"Mistress Ogilvie, and you, *Monsieur le Prince,* the King begs of you the 'Ogilvie Lament.'"

Margaret turned eagerly to the Prince.

"Was that you who played a little while ago?"

"But yes. The music, though, makes itself, for my violin is from Cremona, made by Antonio Stradivari himself."

The King signed to them to come nearer the daïs, and as the Prince came in with his violin and began to play there was silence. For a moment Margaret felt as if she were suffocating, her throat of leather, her tongue red-hot iron, then she forgot herself in the beauty of the violin obbligato and sang the familiar words as she had never sung them before.

"Now a' is done that men can do,
  An' a' is done in vain;
My love and native land, fareweel,
  For I maun cross the main, my dear,
  For I maun cross the main!"

As the last note of the violin died away Margaret saw the King's eyes meet the Prince of Este's, and it seemed as if a flame passed between them, so brilliant and ardent that beside it her own Jacobite loyalty paled like the shadow of a dream. She felt like a cold and lonely wanderer who, through the gleam of a lighted window, sees the warmth and happiness of the home he has never known. Irrelevantly into her mind came the memory of old Janet reading aloud from the huge old black-letter Bible of her dead Covenanting father: "And Jonathan loved David as he loved his own soul. . . . Thy love for me was great, passing the love of women."

CHAPTER III

THE BORGIA RING

The guard at the Seagate shook his head and scratched his sandy hair as he turned over the pass which he had just taken in through the grille. He looked doubtfully at the royal seal and studied the clear, sloping signature —"James R."—sideways and upside down.

"Ye maun bide a wee," he vouchsafed finally, "till I've fetchit Captain Leslie."

The wooden shutter clanged across the grille and Piero, Prince of Este, muttered to himself a long string of highly coloured and picturesque Italian oaths. His mare pawed the frozen snow and whinnied impatiently; he laid his cheek against her satin neck and she thrust her muzzle into the palm of the fringed glove of Spanish leather on his right hand.

"These Scots!" murmured the Prince. "I learned the password as pat as any parrot, but it appears they cannot even understand their own language. But what would you, Roxane, in such a climate? Over a month have we been here, and nothing but snow, snow and more snow; never a gleam of sun or moon or stars, only ice, ice and more ice. The devil himself would be frozen stiff."

He looked northward where on his right hand Dundee Law and the Hill of Balhay lifted snow-capped heads into the lowering sky. To the left, crowded within their encircling walls, the roofs of Dundee sank to the banks of the Firth; everywhere, as far as eye could see, was the unbroken expanse of snow, descending to the steel-

grey ice of the Tay, under the iron of the low snow-laden clouds.

The words of the King's letter to Bolingbroke announcing his landing at Peterhead on December 22 came to Piero's memory: "I am at last, thank God, in mine own ancient kingdom."

He gave a wry smile and flung his purple cloak more tightly round his shoulders.

"*Bacco!* I would rather thank God to be out of it."

A sudden nostalgia seized him for Italian skies, fierce, hot sun and wine-red seas. He saw his home, that had been his father's and his forefathers' for a thousand years —the grim old fortress on its hill, every stone scarred and stained by battle and blood, but gleaming rose-red as a fairy dream while the sun rose over the Romagnan marshes, honey-colour as the sun set behind the snow-clad wooded Apennines. He saw the terraced gardens, with their wide views north to Mantua, east, whence, at sunset, the little cool breeze blew from the Adriatic, over grey olive trees, orchards of peach and cherry, and the sloping vineyards. He saw the heavy brooding darkness of stone pines, long rows of cypresses piercing the sapphire of the sky with their black spearheads; oranges gleaming like balls of fire among the dark yet shining leaves; the pale gold of lemons amid the wax-white of blossom; the rosy foam of almonds; the blood-red buds of pomegranates; fountains casting their silver veils of flying spray between fleeing marble nymphs and swift amorous gods.

The clang of metal as the iron bars were dropped and the gate opened brought Piero back to dour reality, and to his relief he found that the officer spoke French, and having admitted him, enquired how he could be of service.

"By directing me, if you will, to the house of Master Forbes."

"Gang by the Bucklemaker Wynd, turn down by Wellgate and Hurrygate towards the Market-Place."

Piero made a gesture of despair and the other laughed.

"Ye will never find it. I will show you, for we have just changed guards and I'm away to dinner."

As they went along the narrow winding streets, where the snow of three days before was piled deep on either side, Piero remarked on the emptiness of the town, and Captain Leslie smiled.

"Have ye forgotten 'tis the Sabbath? No one will be out of kirk yet. Yes, there are the first from the Auld Kirk. Master Green must have been shorter than his wont. Last Sabbath he prayed for an hour and preached for over two."

As Piero reached the Forbes' house the door was just being opened by Margaret, who greeted him with surprise and pleasure.

"We'll put up your mare ourselves," she said; "no one is home from kirk, and Janet and Elspeth have gone to the Howff."

She laughed at his puzzled face as she led the way to the stables.

"The burial ground, near the Auld Steeple," she explained, "where Elspeth's mother is buried."

"I'll not unsaddle Roxane, Mademoiselle, for I cannot stay. I must be back at Scoon before dusk."

"You have ridden far to-day?"

"A few miles seem far," he answered evasively, "when the road is strange and well-nigh impassable."

"The worse the roads, the better for us," she said, as she kicked off her wooden pattens and took off cloak and hood in the hall; "so they keep the red Campbell tied at Stirling. Come into the dining-room; there will be a good fire there."

She poured out a glass of wine and brought it to him

as he stood by the window, looking at her with an intent gaze.

"Come to the fire and thaw yourself in Uncle Jock's lug chair," she said, pointing to a high-backed, winged arm-chair standing with its back to them before the hearth.

He shook his head and handed her the glass before he drank.

"I shall be colder when I go out if I warm myself now. Give me the toast, Mademoiselle."

She took the glass and was about to pass it over the decanter of water on the table, then checked herself with a laugh.

"No need," she said, "since he is no more over the water, but among his own. The King, God bless him and crown him with success!"

"Better still, with happiness, and give him his heart's desire," he answered gravely, then, putting his lips where hers had touched, he drained the glass and put it down on the wide window-seat.

His long circular cloak hung from his left shoulder; his left hand was thrust into the breast of his green, gold-laced coat; his high boots of soft untanned leather were stained with thawing snow and rust-coloured patches. The flickering firelight struck gleams from his thick short hair and caressed the smooth olive of clean-cut jaw and chin. Suddenly he looked up and his eyes held Margaret's—eyes so splendid that she had never even dreamed of such beauty.

"Mademoiselle, do you pray?" he asked abruptly.

"I go to kirk on the Sabbath," she stammered.

"That is not prayer such as I mean, prayer so strong that it takes Heaven by violence. Pray like that, pray that all may yet be well."

"You think. . . . You fear?"

"Delays, treachery, weakness!" he broke out passionately. *"Dio mio!* If we had a *man,* Berwick instead of Mar, a soldier instead of a turncoat, a general instead of a dilatory fool!"

"Why is the Duke of Berwick not here to help his brother?"

"His excuse was that, being a Marshal of France, he could not desert her service."

"If the Duke of Argyle could be persuaded that his true interest lies with his lawful sovereign, not with Elector George, would he not bring the best part of his army from Stirling with him?"

Piero did not answer. He had a swift memory of his secret interview with the red Campbell at Stirling two days before; he saw the large grey-hazel eyes that could not look a man straight in the face; the sensual nostrils, small pouting lips, weak chin, sandy hair just showing under the curls of the wig, the small, plump pink hands that fluttered irresolutely as their owner talked to gain time. Piero had put all his fascination, his Italian diplomacy, his passionate devotion to the King into his words. At one moment he fancied that he had won the day. Even now he felt that three, two months ago, he could have won for the Jacobite Cause this timorous, vacillating fox who was the greatest chieftain in Scotland, the *MacCaelein Mor.*

He made a sweeping gesture with his right hand.

"If," he said. "Always *if!* I must go, still twenty miles to Scoon, where the King lies, and the messenger waits my return. Then, if all goes well, our prayers may indeed not prove fruitless."

"If—again *if!"*

"There is always one. Roxane might fall. A shot, a dagger, and I might lie frozen till spring came—if it ever comes here."

"Heaven forbid!"

He looked from the window.

"People are coming. It would be well if none knew I had been here; so, with your leave, I will be gone."

"The King sent you a message, Mademoiselle," he said, as he held open the stable door for her: "'If you see Mistress Ogilvie, say I ask her promise to dance with me the first minuet we shall tread at St. James's.' Shall I take him your answer?"

She lifted her head proudly.

"Tell the King that he has but to ask for me to obey. All that I have is his for the asking—loyalty, possessions, life itself."

"You have many horses, Mademoiselle," he said, as he opened the door of Roxane's stall.

"Two Flemish stallions for the coach, Elspeth's little mare, my gelding, who is lame from a strained fetlock, and Uncle Forbes' grey Spey, whom he bred twenty years ago at his old home, Glenisla. Your girth, Monsieur, needs tightening."

He gave an angry exclamation in Italian.

"Mademoiselle, I am desolated. I wished none to know of my presence; but, as you see, I cannot tighten it myself with one hand."

He drew his left hand from the breast of his coat; it was roughly tied up with a handkerchief over a thick wad of linen soaked with blood.

She flung an armful of hay on the corn-bin.

"Sit there while I fetch warm water and linen. You should have told me before. None will come and I can tighten your girth."

She returned in a moment, undid the hand and gave an exclamation of horror when she saw that the palm was gashed to the bone from the base of the first finger to the outside of the wrist—while the linen pad was covered with mud as well as the blood which had oozed through it.

When she had deftly washed and cleansed the wound and bound it up, the hand suddenly went limp in her grasp, and looking up she saw the Prince with eyes shut and face as pale as death. She held a glass to his lips.

"Drink this. 'Tis good Scotch whiskey, and will put new life into you."

He drank it obediently, then opened wide eyes and began to cough and sputter.

"*Bacco!* What have you given me, liquid fire? 'Tis hot as hell."

"How did it happen, that terrible cut?"

"I was fool enough to catch in my bare hand the dagger that was meant for my heart. I turned a thought too quickly, or he would have stabbed me neatly from behind. He is now where he meant me to be, frozen stiff in the snow."

"I am sorry I hurt you so much, but if that hand had not been cleansed the wound would not have healed in this bitter cold. That ring of yours—I have one like it that was my mother's."

He lifted his right hand, and the large square emerald on the little finger gleamed in its heavy gold setting of grapes.

"This belonged to our ancestress, Lucrezia Borgia, so must yours have done. You know there's poison in them?"

"You leave it there?"

"*Sicuro.* One never knows when it might be useful, this famous Borgia poison, for others or—the gods forbid!—for oneself. When we meet again you must show me yours, and I will tell you how the spring works."

Margaret gave a little shiver, then, as he put the wounded hand back into the breast of his coat and rose, she said:

"You cannot use that hand."

"I can hold the reins with my right, and with Roxane it would matter little if I used them not at all."

"But if you are attacked?"

"I can still use my right hand and arm. Forgive my weakness just now, but I have not slept for three nights, and this hand has bled all day. Now I must go. *A riverderci* and thank you."

He raised her hand to his lips, and when he had mounted, looked down at her standing in the dim stable in her grey Sabbath gown, with its plain collar held at her breast by a knot of black ribbon, her beauty glowing in its quiet setting with the brilliance of a jewel.

She ran into the hall and stood at the window long after he had vanished down the High Street. His hair gleamed like polished metal, she thought; his cheeks and lips were smooth and cold as bronze. No, it was rather steel that he resembled—a Toledo blade—bright, keen, finely tempered, supple yet unbreakable.

Down the now deserted street a tall, thin figure in a black cloak came rather wearily, and Margaret ran to open the door to her uncle, who had only returned from a visit to Edinburgh late the night before.

He smiled and sank gratefully onto the chair she pushed to the fire.

"I'm tired, Meg; that ride home from Edinburgh was gey hard in this weather. I had to come across the Forth to Kirkcaldy and up by Cupar to avoid Argyle's army. Colonel Borgard and the English troops landed at Leith when I was there. He expected to reach Stirling last night, and it was rumoured the Duke would march on Perth to-day with these reinforcements. As I reached the inn at Cupar a horseman rode out north. It was dusk, so I could not see his face clearly, but I fancied it was thine Italian kinsman. But how could he be there and in

attendance on the Chevalier at Scoon? And Cupar is enemy country for him."

Margaret answered his question with another.

"What said the Edinburgh leech about yerself, Uncle Jock? I did not ask last night, because Elsie was there."

"Ye're right, lassie; we need say naught to her. My heart's not over strong, he said, but 'twill be all right if I can sleep again and the bitter cold grows less. He gave me some famous drafts—one to take every night; I take one in a glass of Rhenish and in a quarter of an hour or less I'm asleep and never stir till morn. I maun go and get my boots off. Alan Fraser comes to dinner, also Captain John Hunter, an English client of mine, Ian Gordon, our cousin, and Major Royland."

"The red-coat prisoner on parole?"

"A blunt, straightforward fellow he seems, who served three campaigns in Flanders under his Grace of Marlborough. Ah, my bonnie," as Elsie came down the stairs, "there's the first guest knocking. Ye maun talk to him till Margaret and I are ready."

Elsie was nothing loth to obey her father, since the first arrival proved to be Alan Fraser, for whom she poured out some Rhenish wine while he warmed himself before the dining-room fire.

"I'm not the first to drink," he said, pointing to the empty glass on the window-seat. "Whom have ye been entertaining? Have a care, or I shall grow jealous."

"That you will never need to be," she smiled up at him as he put an arm about her; then, looking round to see the door was shut, she whispered: "tell no one, Alan, but I fancy Meg has a lover at last."

"Never! Did you see him?"

"I saw not him, nor he me. The cauld in the Kirk gave me a sair head, so I did not go with Janet to the Howff, but slipped home and sat down in Daddie's lug-chair there

before the fire. I must have slept, for I heard none come in, but then I heard voices talking—Meg's and a man's, I think the Italian's. They spoke of the red Campbell."

"Naught else?"

"That was the first thing I heard, and then the Italian said he must go, still twenty miles to Scoon, and the messenger waited his return."

"Was that all?"

"'If all goes well,' he said, 'our prayers will not prove fruitless.' And then this, Alan, which made me stay quiet and not let them know I was there, that she should tell none he had been here."

"Said he not whence he came, nor what should go well?"

"Naught else that I could hear. There's Meg's voice, and Alan, promise you'll tell no one, for I would tell none but you."

As he bent and kissed her swiftly there came again into his eyes the glint as of a bare blade.

CHAPTER IV

THE KING'S PERIL

As the substantial dinner drew to a close Major Royland turned to his host.

"This is the last time, sir, that I shall enjoy your hospitality for the nonce. My exchange papers came this morning, and I leave at dawn to-morrow to rejoin my regiment at Stirling."

"Maybe ye'll not have so far to go," smiled Master Forbes, "'twas common talk in Edinburgh that his Grace of Argyle was to advance to-day."

"'Tis General Cadogan, then, who has spurred him to action at last," answered the soldier. "His Grace is but a jibbing mount."

"Dhé! he's a grand fine leader, the *MacCaelein Mor,"* burst out Ian Gordon, "as brave and swift to strike as Bobbing John Mar, the seven times turncoat."

Captain Hunter raised his eyebrows and spoke in his slow English voice that to Scotch ears seemed always to veil a faint sneer.

"Surely not seven? I thought he favoured the Stuarts as a youth; entered public life as a Whig under the late Queen Anne; then turned Tory; back again to Whig to push on the Union with Scotland in 1707; Tory when the Whigs fell in 1710; Hanoverian on the accession of King George four years later; Jacobite when he raised the Chevalier's standard at Braemar last September. Egad, though, you're right; 'tis indeed seven. If he'd had as

many plans of campaign as changes of opinion, sure we'd all be donning white cockades."

"If you had had a soldier like the Duke of Marlborough to command you," said Royland, "things might have gone very differently."

"Or His Grace's nephew," put in Alan Fraser, "the Duke of Berwick. 'Tis passing strange he's not here to support his half-brother."

"And now," said Master Forbes gravely, "the present situation of the Jacobites seems to me one of little hope."

"When all's said," drawled Hunter, "the Jacobites have little to thank Mar for, and much to blame him. He should never have raised the standard when none was ready, and though I admire the Chevalier's spirit in landing at Peterhead a month ago with no support but half a dozen gentlemen, he'd have done better to wait for French troops and Papal money."

"Is it not enough that he came himself?" cried Margaret; "the King in his ain ancient kingdom, among his ain loyal folk, is more than French soldiers or Roman gold pieces."

Gordon swore in Gaelic and struck the table with his great hand till the glasses clinked.

"Whatever good has this twig of a foreign lad done to us? By the Mother of God! none, and less than none! He falls sick of an ague as soon as himself's on shore and goes like a pale shivering wraith, and not a word of the Gaelic can he speak, forbye!"

"Are not English, French and Italian enough for you, Cousin Ian?" asked Margaret with an angry flush. "One would think from your words that you believed the King coward as well as fool."

Hunter's drawl answered her.

"Egad, sir, one must at least do the Chevalier the justice to allow his undoubted courage. We all know

he distinguished himself in three campaigns in Flanders—at Oudenarde in 1708, Malplaquet the next year, and again in 1710. I myself saw him at the Scarpe when I was an ensign in the Scots' Greys, and I expect Major Royland can corroborate this."

"I must allow," answered Royland rather grudgingly, "that at Malplaquet he nigh turned our victory to a most bloody defeat."

"He had been ill with fever," continued Hunter; "could scarce drag himself from bed or mount his horse, but he led the French cavalry in twelve desperate charges and was under the most devilish fire for over six hours. I saw him clearly once when the French horse came right up to our lines; he was not thirty yards from me—pale, with eyes a-blaze, the blue ribbon of the Garter across his breast so that all might know him, cheering on his men with his sword in his left hand, for his right had been disabled with a sabre-cut."

"Did you see him again the next year?" asked Royland. "When we were on one bank of the Scarpe and the French on the other, he often rode by the river to show himself, and once, at our request, came nearer still."

Hunter thrust his hand into the breast of his well-cut though sober coat of fine russet-brown cloth, and from a small case of soft leather took a medal wrapped in a worn piece of paper and handed them to Margaret, who sat next him.

"Maybe, Mistress, you have not seen one of these medals? The Chevalier sent a trumpeter across the Scarpe with a score of them. They were devilish hard to get, for so many officers wanted one. You'll see writ on the paper: 'The metal is good, for it bore six hours' fire; you know that it was hot, for yourselves blew the coals.'"

Margaret bent over the medal, with the British Isles and *"Reddite"* on one side, on the other: *"Cujus est,"* and the King's profile, clear-cut, tragic, but a little disdainful of adverse fate. Then she returned it with eyes aglow.

"A vos beaux yeux, Mistress," Hunter smiled, lifting his glass; "let me perish if I envy not him who sets them so finely on fire."

"Why are you not one of us, Captain Hunter, since you admire the King so much and carry his portrait next your heart?"

"Faith, I care naught if German Geordie or French-bred Jamie kings it at St. James's, so I be left in peace in my Hertfordshire home to enjoy the nice little fortune I owe to the lucky chance that my great-aunt had not seen me since I was a charming infant, and which Master Forbes is busy changing from barren Scotch acres into good English guineas for me. The difference between you and us, Mistress, is that Jacobitism is a religion in Scotland, but only politics in England."

At this moment the old coachman entered and addressed his master.

"There's a lad wi'oot frae auld Leddy Scrymgeour. She's deein' and will ye gae tae her noo?"

"Is it passable for the coach?"

"Aye, he says a troop o' Hielanders passed yestere'en and beat doon the snaw."

Master Forbes rose.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen, to leave you so unceremoniously, but I'm thinking I'll not be home the night."

He stood by Elspeth's chair, looking down at her flushed face and over-bright eyes while she put a hot little hand into his.

"Bairn, the cauld in kirk did you no good. Away with ye to bed and Meg will see ye bide there till I'm home, and that old Janet gives ye a gey hot posset.

Captain Hunter, shall I set you down at your lodgings? I pass them on my way to the Seagate."

"Ye can take me too," said Gordon, "for I'm due on guard at the Gate in half an hour."

As Margaret waited for Elsie at the door she fancied that a quick glance of understanding passed between her and Alan Fraser, with a touch of her fingers to her lips and an almost imperceptible nod from him, but she thought no more of it till, after handing Elsie over to Janet's ministrations, she came down again, as she thought, to an empty house. She peered through the landing window to watch the old coach, drawn by the Flemish stallions, lumbering off up the Wellgate, when her attention was attracted by the sound of low voices from the dining-room door, which was ajar. One was Alan Fraser's, speaking in quick low sentences, and the five words she heard galvanized her into startled action.

"The capture of the Pretender."

Then Royland's voice, louder:

"Are we not like to be overheard?"

In the moment when Alan went to the far door leading to the kitchen stairs and Royland stooped to throw some more coal onto the fire, Margaret had slipped in to the room, behind the heavy curtains, and was curled out of sight on the window-seat. Alan shut the door onto the landing.

"The lassies are upstairs with Janet," he said; "none else in the house to know we're still here. As I said, you doubtless know that the Pretender walks or rides almost unattended every day before noon. You know the price upon his head? A hundred thousand pounds sterling, a fortune beyond the richest dream. 'Tis yours if we succeed, for all I ask is revenge."

"What harm has he done you?"

"My father's sister was a fair innocent maid when

his father came to Holyrood thirty-five years ago. Now she's a daft old woman with an idiot son who should never have been born."

"That is no fault of the Pretender's."

" 'The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children to the third and fourth generation,' said the Lord. And my father on his deathbed bade me with his last breath never to rest till I had taken vengeance on the son of Belial."

"I fancied there was something about vengeance belonging to God."

"But He chooseth human instruments to work His Will, and He hath predestined me from among His people, not only to punish past sins, but to save His elect from once more being trampled underfoot by them that, like Ahab, do abominably, and worship false gods; selling their souls unto those priests of Baal, the Jesuits, and setting up in high places their harlots with painted faces and tired heads like the idolatress Jezebel."

"Faith," answered Royland a trifle impatiently, "I never heard aught against this young man's morals."

"He is the son of evil-doers and idolators, and through my mouth the Lord hath said to him, as He did to Ahab by the mouth of Elijah the prophet, 'Behold, I will bring evil upon thee and cut off thy posterity for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked Me to anger.' "

"Meantime let's hear what is your plan for capturing young Ahab, for it grows late."

The glow of fanatic exultation died out of Fraser's eyes and face and he spoke quickly and clearly.

"Till two hours ago it stood thus. One of us, Captain Price, commands the Pretender's guard to-morrow. He was to propose a walk or ride towards Dunloss House. I was to be there with twenty men. Once captured, we

should have ridden to Stirling with the prisoner and handed him over there."

"But this is now changed? Because Argyle was to march to-day on Perth?"

"That and more. You know the Italian, the Pretender's inseparable?"

"Aye. They say he's the devil himself for daring, with a tongue as swift and sharp as his sword."

"He was with Argyle two days ago, to try and convert him."

"Did he succeed?"

"No. The devil whom he serves alone knows how he got into Stirling. He came out by Kinross and Cupar to avoid spies, but, save for his devilish luck, we'd have had him on the Fife shore as he was waiting for the boat to bring him across the Tay. Something made him turn an instant too soon, and instead of the dagger reaching his heart it only got his hand. The man that failed is stiff on the Fife shore; the other got away and reported before I came here."

"What then?" asked Royland rather drowsily.

"The Italian was here but an hour or two ago, in this room."

Royland sat up.

"Gad! Did you see him?"

"I know it from one who was here. He said he must reach Scoon before dusk, for the messenger could not start till he returned, and 'Pray that all may go well,' said he."

"What's the answer to the riddle?"

"I read it thus. That Argyle, cautious as ever, stands in with both sides. If the Pretender's army can strike a smashing blow, he'll go over to them. I take it he's given a hint to the Italian of the plan of the Hanoverian advance, and that when they hear it at Perth they'll send orders by this messenger, probably for a flanking move-

ment on the left to take Argyle's army in the rear and capture him, if Cadogan can be kept quiet. I slipped out before we dined and sent half a dozen men to capture the messenger and his papers if he rides this way from Perth."

"And myself?"

"This. You have your exchange papers; instead of dawn you ride to-night. One of us is in command at the Westgate; you will tell him from me you go on the business of cutting roses and snaring blackbirds, and the password to the Jacobite camp is: 'Now or Never!' You deliver this sealed packet to Captain Price from me, with the same cant of roses and birds. He tells the Pretender Argyle demands a secret interview with him at the place named in this letter. Instead of the Campbell, I'll be there. Should you be delayed or arrested and I receive no word from Price in answer, he will take the Pretender to Dunloss, and I'll be *there*. So we have him both ways, but the newer plan's the better, since they think none knows of the Italian's interview with Argyle."

Royland rose with a yawn and stretched himself.

"And if he resists?"

"The price holds good, dead or alive."

"I like not murder nor treachery."

"Is one hundred thousand pounds beneath your notice, and probable promotion?"

Royland hesitated and Fraser went nearer and touched him on the arm.

"If that little business of the loot after Malplaquet were known. . . ."

The other's red face paled.

"Give me the papers and I'll be gone."

He thrust them into the breast of his red coat and followed Fraser from the room and downstairs. While they were getting their hats and cloaks in the hall

Margaret ran into her uncle's room by the other door, snatched up the little phial of colourless liquid which was standing, as she had hoped it would be, on the table by Master Forbes' bed, and came leisurely down the front stairs into the hall as Fraser was opening the front door.

"Are you deserting me and leaving me to perish of ennui all alone?" she called; and the two men turned.

"Naught but the direst necessity would make us leave you," bowed Royland.

"Duty?" Margaret smiled at Fraser with murder in her heart.

"One that could not be evaded an I would," he answered grimly, as his steel-grey eyes met hers.

"Master Forbes would never let you go without a parting cup. I'll bring you one."

She filled two glasses with wine, emptied the phial into one, which she gave to the redcoat.

"I'll not drink unless you pledge me," he said.

She touched it with her lips.

"Success and happiness!"

He drained it at a draught and kissed her hand, while Fraser flung open the door.

"Come," he said sharply, "it grows late. Good-night, Meg, and guard Elsie well."

"To our next meeting!" cried Royland gaily, with a wave of his feathered hat—nor knew what fate should hang on it for him and her.

He stumbled a little as they went out into the snow, and Margaret, watching them down the street, saw him put up a hand to his forehead and push back wig and hat before he and Fraser parted.

As Margaret arrived breathless at the top of the stairs, Janet was just coming out of Elspeth's room and shutting the door noiselessly.

"Whist! The bairn's asleep now after her hot draft. But what ails ye now, lassie? Are ye fey?"

Margaret pulled her into her own room and shut the door.

"There is evil afoot, Janet dear, and not a moment to lose. A plan to capture the King by treachery in the morning."

"The Lord save him! But what can we do?"

"I ride now to Scoon; 'tis the only way."

"Lord save us too! Ye're gey daft!"

"There's none I can trust—traitors and treachery everywhere."

"A lane lassie canna ride that road the nicht."

"No, but a lad can. When Charles went to London he left his things here. Fetch me his riding coat, breeches, shirt, hat and wig."

"I'll nae stir a foot for any sich fule plan."

Margaret, who had already torn off her grey gown and stood now in her linen shift, seized the old woman by the shoulders.

"We *must* do it, Janet; it's for the King. What do any of us matter beside the Cause? I must go, and you must help me."

The old mouth was still set in a grim line; the old eyes were stern and the grey head shook firmly in dissent.

Margaret dropped her voice.

"Janet, dear, didn't you love Archie, your own only bairn, more than any other living being? Wouldn't you have sacrificed yourself, any of us, for him? Yet you didn't grudge him for the Stuart Cause. He fell by Dundee in that last charge at Killiecrankie. He was all you had, but you didn't repine."

The nurse lifted her head proudly, though the slow tears dimmed her keen eyes.

"Why would I be greetin' when I had gi'en my bairn for the King?"

Margaret suddenly hugged her, gave the wrinkled cheek a swift kiss, unlocked the door and pushed her out through it.

As they went into the stables Janet gave a grim chuckle.

" 'Tis a braw laddie ye make, forbye. The Maister himsel' wadna' ken ye."

She held the flickering stable lantern up and surveyed Margaret in the trim, fair wig, green cloth coat, orange waistcoat and spurred boots of Master Forbes's absent ward, then she pulled a pistol from the holster of one of the saddles, while Margaret led out the old grey.

"Isla's strained her fetlock, and Elsie's mare is not up to my weight, so I must take Spey."

"Deil knew what the Maister'll say whin he gets hame."

"Deil cares!" panted Margaret as she tightened the girths, then, as she mounted, Janet thrust a bottle into the pocket of the green coat.

"Usquebaugh," she explained as she unbolted the door into the street. "God speed ye, lassie, and save the King."

As she turned down White Hart Street Margaret muffled the heavy frieze cloak about her till scarcely the tip of her nose was visible between its folds and the peak of the brown beaver hat. Spey's hoofs fell noiselessly in the snow; the moon was not yet risen; most of the windows were already dark, for the good citizens of Dundee kept early hours on the Sabbath. But for the occasional glimmer of a lantern before a door the narrow street lay dark and eerie. Sudden fear seized Margaret as of a child left alone at night in unfamiliar surround-

ings, and for an instant she would have given all she possessed to be safe in her own bed, with Elsie asleep next door and old Janet stealing in to see that the candle was safely out.

Spey shied suddenly, and as she reined him in she saw that he had nearly stumbled over a figure in the gutter. She jumped down and by the light from an uncurtained window above she recognized Royland, lying on his side and breathing stertorously. She tore open his coat in triumph; Fate had indeed played into her hands, and she could now rifle his papers. The pocket in which she had seen them placed was empty, and before she could search the others the window above was opened and George Cameron, the suspected Hanoverian spy, leaned out with a pistol in his hand.

"What do ye there?" he shouted, pointing it at her.

"Come down," called Margaret, in as gruff a voice as she could manage; "Major Royland is here, drugged and robbed."

Then, as the window was shut and a heavy tread was heard on the stairs, she leapt on Spey and in a moment was round the corner out of sight.

When she reached the Westgate, the captain, who had evidently been keeping out the cold by liberal potations before the guard-room fire, showed no anxiety to linger, and once the word and password were given, shouted to the men to open the gate. Then, as old Spey began to move, he suddenly laid a fat hand on the bridle and peered curiously into Margaret's face.

"Gad! Ye're not Major Royland, who's seen three campaigns in Flanders, but a smooth-faced boy."

Sick with fright, she laughed hoarsely, and whispered:

"Fraser thought best to change the messenger at the last minute. Royland's been too much at Master Forbes'

lately, and ye ken Mistress Ogilvie's gey daft about the Blackbird we spoke of."

"Fraser's richt," chuckled the other; "distrust women. They're a set of baggages, but life'd be dull without them. Off with ye now, and good luck!"

Behind Margaret the heavy iron-studded gate creaked on its hinges; the bar fell back into its socket with a clang as she set old Spey at a canter along the road that ran white and shimmering in the light of the rising moon, the road to adventure and the King.

CHAPTER V

NOW OR NEVER!

THE only sounds in the room were the crackling of the wood-fire and the squeak of Mar's quill pen as it drove over the paper. The King stood by the uncurtained window, looking into the white world, which but for a few hours' thaw, had lain bound in the grip of this frozen snow since his arrival five weeks before. The moon, which rode high in the east, cast shadows of inky blue on the sparkling snow, but to south and west the clear serenity of the sky was stained by the red glare of fire. Mar flung down his pen with a grunt of satisfaction, sanded the paper, stretched himself with a yawn and strolled over to the window.

"Egad! That's a fine bonfire, Sire," he said, taking a pinch of snuff.

"How many villages?"

"Auchterarder, Crieff, Blackfoord, Dunning, Dalreoch and Muthill—Clanronald has carried out his orders thoroughly. This should give pause to Argyle's advance."

"I like not this burning of my people's homes."

"War, Sire, war! And they naught but peasants, no gentry among these."

James's steady eyes met the shifty grey ones.

"Peasants, Your Grace, are men even as we are, body, mind and soul."

"They can be compensated later, if Your Majesty wishes."

"Can money replace their lost homes and treasures,

the women and children who must perforce perish without shelter in this cruel cold?"

As the King went across to the fire, and stood silent, looking down into the gay golden tongues of flame, Mar fancied that there was a gleam of tears under the long black lashes.

"Gad, Sire!" he burst out, "war is no business of silken gloves and mealy mouths. . . ."

Then he broke off, for James Keith came in, whom he hated almost as much as he did Lord Marischal.

"Sire, Captain Price would see you at once on a matter of extreme urgency."

As Mar left the room the King laid a hand on Keith's shoulder with a smile.

"Who is this Captain Price, *mon ami?* Should I know him?"

"He attends on Your Majesty to-morrow morn. A soft-spoken Southerner, with a jutting nose and eyes set too close together."

"Send him in, and tell your brother that when he is free I would see him."

Keith took the white hand from his shoulder and held it to his lips.

"Sire, I like not this Price. Let me wait here out of sight. I'd not have you alone with him."

The King laid his other hand on Keith's.

"No need, Jamie, my dear, if my Lord Marischal is here, or even if I were alone. I fear no man's dagger nor sword; I am a Stuart. To bed with you; you're over young for so much watching."

"I would count it an honour if I might die in your service. As for the kindness Your Majesty has shown me . . ."

"Have I not reason to be kind, for your own sake and your brother's? Faithful friends are all too rare in a world of treachery and self-seeking."

"That is why Your Majesty sets such value on the Prince of Este?"

The King's white teeth flashed suddenly in the olive face as he laughed at the jealous question, and Keith, half-ashamed, laughed too.

"Piero and I have always been inseparable; he gives me all I myself lack—gaiety, brilliance, sunshine. But we waste time; send in Price, and, if you will, your brother."

Keith raised the King's hand, which he still held, and exclaimed:

"Your ring, Sire, the diamond signet that belonged to your uncle, Charles II. I have never seen you without it. It is not lost nor stolen?"

"Piero has it."

"You gave it him?"

"I have lent it because he rides on a very secret errand and may need it, as he carries no papers. Ah, my Lord Marischal, I was just sending your brother for you. Will you remain while I see Captain Price?"

Marischal, still in the worn blue coat that matched his eyes, looked down very tenderly at James, who leaned back in the high wooden chair and stretched his slim feet in their buckled shoes to the blaze; the smooth young face pale under the heavy curls of the auburn wig, the red mouth drooping wearily, the coat of wine-coloured velvet laced with gold, the sky blue of the Garter ribbon across the breast, the green of St. Andrew over the lace cravat.

Captain Price came in, bowed and looked doubtfully at Marischal.

"My news, Your Majesty, is for your private ear alone."

"You can speak before Lord Marischal."

"A messenger has just brought this packet, which I was to deliver into no hands but Your Majesty's own."

"What messenger?" asked Marischal.

"I know not. He gave sign and countersign correctly, asked for me, and when he had given packet and message, rode away towards Crieff."

James took the packet, looked at the plain seal, opened it and read the few lines of writing inside, then looked up while the colour flamed under the olive skin.

"You attend me to-morrow, I think, Captain Price. Be ready with a couple of horses at eight in the morning."

Price withdrew and James handed the slip of paper to Marischal.

> "If you will meet me to-morrow, Monday, about two hours before noon at the ruined farm beyond the second cross-roads on the road to Dunblane, I will conclude the bargain discussed two days ago.—Yr. very humble servant, A."

Marischal lifted puzzled eyes.

"Who is this 'A,' Sire?"

"His Grace of Argyle."

"A trap, a very palpable trap."

"No; for look you, he mentions the bargain discussed two days ago. Of that none knew save myself, the Duke and Piero, who rode secretly to Stirling and saw him."

"You told none—not a living soul?"

"Not even His Grace of Mar," replied the King with a little smile, for it was common knowledge that no love was lost between the Commander-in-Chief and Marischal.

"You'll not go to this tryst? 'Twould be madness."

"Would you have me frighten this shy bird from our lure by a company of Highlanders? 'Tis more than worth the risk to my person. Win Argyle, win all."

Marischal again shook his head, then James laid a hand on his arm with all the Stuart fascination in voice and smile.

"My dear lord, Piero all but gained a promise of submission from him two days ago, contingent on a defeat of his right wing to save his face."

"Where is the Prince now?"

"He would not trust any but himself, so changed horses after he had but stayed to report to me and rode out to the Brig of Earn with orders to our left wing to advance by Abernethy and outflank the Hanoverian right, as had been arranged."

"Would Clanronald take orders from the Prince?"

"A cipher message, and reinforced by my signet ring which he wears."

Marischal suddenly laughed.

"Faith! 'Twill put the nose out of joint on our Commander-in-Chief, and no thanks to him if we succeed. 'Tis the hour appointed for the Council. Shall I summon them?"

"Is it indeed so late? The Prince, then, should have returned an hour or more ago. Pray heaven no ill's befallen him."

Lord Marischal's hand was already on the door, when he turned and came back, his expressive face set in grim lines.

"Sire, I do most earnestly entreat you to be careful. Trust none. I hate to have to say it of my own people, but there is treachery everywhere; traitors even among the highest and those nearest to your person."

"'A man's foes shall be they of his own household,'" murmured James.

"The Duke. . . . Nay, I'll name no names, only trust none, Sire, lest ill befall."

"My lord, I vow I'll disobey you there *sans façon* and

make exception of George, Earl Marischal and his very dear young brother, James Keith."

The colour came into Marischal's face and the sensitive mouth quivered.

"Sire, for us both, I thank you. But, once again, trust none else."

The feminine streak which was always the fascination and so often the undoing of his race brought a little smile to James's lips.

"Not even the Prince of Este?" he asked slyly; "nor Monsieur de St. Etienne?"

The blue eyes flashed for a moment under their level brows, then Marischal smiled too and left the room.

The King went again to the window, leaning against the stone mullion, and looked out into the winter night. Grim, dour, ice-bound, snow-clad, lay the land of his fathers, yet in his blood, mixed as it was of so many races—Scotch, Danish, Italian, Spanish—there stirred a fervent and abiding tenderness for this northern land and its people wild, undisciplined, lawless, fiercely independent, passionately devoted, loyal unto death and beyond it. "Now or Never," he had written before starting on this wild, almost hopeless venture, and now heart whispered to head, "Now! Now! Now!"

Under that brilliant moon, queening it among the few faint stars, over the snowy hills and frozen rivers his men should even now be marching to victory. He imagined the skirling of the pipes, the swirl of kilts, the fierce slogans and mad triumphant rush of the clans, and there rose in him too the *mire chatha,* the battle madness of Highland blood; the fierce lust of battle; the glory of achievement, which, under his cool exterior, he had known in those mad, splendid charges at Malplaquet. He saw himself entering London amid the shouts of a welcoming and liberated people, leading Mistress Ogilvie out

for the first minuet at St. James's. He remembered her eyes, deep and clear as some far mountain tarn under their curling black lashes, then they faded and he was gazing into more familiar eyes, clear too and liquid under their fringe of black, but golden brown as a heather burn—Piero d'Este's.

As in a flash there passed before him the twenty-seven years of his life. He saw himself as a child, playing with his little sister Louise in the spring woods at St. Germains; boating on the Grand Canal at Versailles; hay-making at the Comtesse de Grammont's Greek villa, or kneeling beside his beautiful, gentle mother in the convent chapel at Chaillot, while the serene beauty of the nuns' voices thrilled him with a nostalgia for he knew not what. He saw himself as a grave, frightened boy of thirteen listening to the breathless last words of the stern father whom he had always feared, himself, not yet twenty, driven back from the very shores of Scotland, fighting with the French in Flanders against his own subjects and that great genius and thrice-dyed traitor, John Churchill. And through all the scenes of memory, like a thread of gold amid the chequered pattern of a life too often shadowed by misfortune, ran his friendship with Piero—the two of them, as children, boys, youths and men, inseparable and unchangingly devoted.

And where was Piero now? If evil fate had taken him, how was life possible without him, without that never-failing warmth of human sympathy, unchanging tenderness and passionate devotion? James knew that in him, as in his father, was some strange streak of ineradicable reserve, of remote aloofness, which made impossible for him the ordinary, easy and generally shallow intimacies of ordinary humanity. In his life there had been two women, his mother and the sister, grief at whose death had almost brought about

his own, and one man, his friend and kinsman, Piero d'Este.

Then, as if the demon of despair had rallied his forces and bidden them advance under their battlecry of "Never! Never!" there fell upon the King the shadow of his race's doom, the adverse fate which again and again had brought tragedy and defeat and death to the Stuarts, which, first by illness then by tempest, had foiled his own gallant attempt to land in Scotland in 1708—the year after the hated Union with England, when the Scots, stirred to their depths by the loss of their national independence, would, almost to a man, have welcomed him as the saviour and liberator of their ancient race. He saw without illusions the hopelessness of this present venture, mismanaged from the first, marred now beyond recall by confusion, ineptitude, delays, treachery. Then, in a further vision, he saw the years that stretched ahead, of poverty, loneliness, exile, the bitterness that Dante has painted for all time of the homeless and dependent wanderer. He saw himself grown old, alone, disillusioned, deserted, laid in an exile's grave beneath the vain empty titles of a monarch without a crown, a King of Shadows.

A touch on his arm roused him and he found the Council of War assembled. Gravely he sat down at the head of the table and drew to him the papers left there by Mar.

"Gentlemen, be seated."

He watched them with a queer feeling of detachment as they sorted themselves out—Mar, in his purple coat with snuff-stains on the gold lace; Marischal in the faded blue; Jules, Marquis de Sarci, one of the half dozen French gentlemen who had landed with him at Peterhead, his painted face and the effeminate fashion of his dress in striking contrast to the rugged bearded face and shaggy

hair of the chieftain beside him, hand on claymore, plaid muffled about him. And it seemed to the King that the men before him were but a dream, the shadow of a dream, while dark upon him was the doom of his race, and before that inner vision that was the heritage of his Celtic blood, Piero d'Este lay cold and stiff in his blood on the frozen snow.

"Gentlemen," he said in a toneless voice, "we are met to discuss our future course, which it is for you to decide; whether we shall advance and attack the enemy on the open field, await his advance here, or withdraw to a position of greater security."

Mar spoke first, urging as reasons for retreat the safety of the King, the discovery two days before of a plot to betray his person, the failure of the Duke of Ormonde's expedition into England, the lack of men, arms and munitions.

Hardly had he sat down than a Highland gentleman leapt to his feet.

"Are we met here resolved to run away from an enemy we've already defeated in the field?" he cried passionately. "Not a man of my clan but would fight and die for the King rather than run away like a coward!"

In the midst of the furious discussion that followed the king's valet slipped into the room and whispered into his master's ear in rapid French.

"I cannot see him," said the King, "he must send in a message."

The attention of those near him was caught, but heated words still raged at the far end of the table.

"Sire, he says the matter is of the most urgent and vital necessity. He seems almost distraught, but will speak to none but yourself or Monsieur de St. Etienne."

"Who and what is he?"

"A mere boy with a face as smooth and body as slender as a girl's."

"Ask Monsieur de St. Etienne if he will have the goodness to see him and report to me here."

Silence had fallen on the company as the King rose and spoke eagerly, eyes aglow, his pale face colouring.

"If this news be good, as, pray heaven, it may be, and my plan has succeeded, we need waste no further time in discussion. The decision will have been taken out of our hands and such a success crown our arms that in a few hours from now we may have won a greater victory than any we dreamed of."

CHAPTER VI

THE KING'S SIGNET

THE officer in command of the outpost shook his head.

"Impossible, *mon Prince,*" he said. "It has just been reported that a strong body of the enemy is advancing that way. You cannot get through."

Piero d'Este slipped back on to the little finger of his wounded hand the King's signet and looked south where the road ran white in the moonlight to the Brig of Earn, then to the road which turned to his right past the burning village of Auchterarder to Stirling. The Highlander laid a hand on the neck of Piero's mount, a gaunt, rawboned chestnut, with an iron mouth and iron endurance.

"If you *must* get through . . ."

"I *must.*"

"You can cross the Tay. The ice is strong enough to bear a battalion. Follow the Dundee road till you are halfway to Errol. You will see a small farm by a ruined mill and the farmer will help you across to the southern shore between Abernethy and Newburgh. Tell him you come from me on the King's business and show him the ring."

Piero held out his hand, and the other looked at his bandaged left one.

"You cannot use that hand, Prince; that horse has the devil's own mouth, and if you are attacked. . . . Let two of my men go with you."

"Thanks, but I must go alone and trust to my luck. It is bad luck that I have not my own mare, but she was dead-beat when I got to Scoon."

Across the frozen river the chestnut plunged and slipped, taking all Piero's strength to hold him with one hand, then, once on the beaten snow of the Dundee road, he settled down into a long steady stride that promised soon to eat up the miles to the ruined farm. As he rode Piero wondered what was the reason for this sudden and unexpected advance of the Hanoverian right wing which threatened the success of all their plans? Was it merely a feint on Argyle's part, a sudden assertion of authority from General Cadogan, who, it was common knowledge, had been sent north to spur the *MacCaelein Mor* to action, or was there treachery? Everywhere, as he knew only too well, were traitors; only two days before a conspiracy has been discovered in which some of the Jacobite leaders had plotted to capture the King and hand him over to the enemy to make good terms for themselves. Yet none knew of the present plan save he himself, who had originated it, the King and the Duke of Argyle. No, betrayal was surely impossible.

Then he began to wonder, as he had often done in these last few weeks, about the people of these northern hills and frozen rivers—their strange mixture of exultant triumph and overwhelming despair, passionate loyalty and mean-souled treachery; the old Faith persecuted unto death, Episcopalianism furtive and illegal, the State religion a tyrannic and bitter Calvinism. Amid all these contradictions there seemed only one point of cohesion and contact, a fierce, proud patriotism that seethed in murderous anger against the Union of nine years ago, which, at one stroke of a stupid, feeble woman's pen, had swept away the independence of Scotland, held for so many centuries

at the cost of blood and tears, possessions, home and life itself. And then he wondered if the Jacobitism which was the beacon-fire to all that was finest and noblest in Scotland, was not only a concentration of this patriotism, if the King himself were not a symbol rather than a person, a standard rather than a leader to his Scotch followers?

Gradually Piero's thoughts grew confused. He had not slept for three nights, and even his magnificent physique began to feel the want of rest, the result of loss of blood and continuous pain from his wounded hand. The steady monotony of his horse's stride began to act as a soporific. Outward things grew dim and blurred. The chestnut, breasting a steep hill, slowed to a walk; the reins slipped from Piero's hand; his eyelids drooped; his head fell forward on to his breast. His horse was just passing the ruined mill when an armful of hay dropped from a forage cart caught its eye; it stopped, began to munch, while the reins slipped down over its neck and head. Moving towards the side of the road in search of more hay, it brushed against an angle of broken stone which struck Piero's left hand and brought him sharply awake. For a moment the pain was so sickening that he bent double over his saddle-bow, nursing the hand which had slipped from the breast of his coat while he was asleep. As he bent there was a blinding flash and roar so close that the right shoulder of his coat was scorched, and the bullet which should have lodged in his brain struck the stone behind and ricochetted from it harmlessly. In a flash he had wheeled his startled horse and then drawn his rapier, as the man who had fired dropped his pistol, drew a claymore, and spurred his black horse with one white stocking. The chestnut, which had reared at first, stood shivering, while the thin Italian rapier flickered against

the smashing onslaught of the heavy sword. It was a case of quickness and skill against brute force, and Piero knew that his only chance lay in getting under his opponent's guard before one of those savage cuts reached his own head or shoulders. He made feint at the sword-arm, then, as the other parried this, the thin line of steel flashed straight for his heart. But in that instant the black horse wheeled, the chestnut, startled, plunged forward, trod on the trailing rein and fell heavily, throwing Piero. As he fell his rapier flew from his hand; he felt that the world was crashing into ruins about him; head and hand were blended in one searing agony, then merciful oblivion.

Very slowly he returned to consciousness, coming back, it seemed, through countless æons of eternity, from the utmost limits of space, till he felt his body again, that sickening pain in head and hand, and, on his lips and in his throat a burning as of the fires of hell. Suddenly he found he could use his right hand, and catching a hand, pushed it from his mouth with such violence that a cold trickle went down his neck. He opened his eyes and looked up; overhead the moon rode high in a cloudless sky; he lay in a patch of inky shadow cast on the snow by a ruined wall. Then in a flash everything came back to him and he tried to rise, but could not move his head, which seemed held in an iron vice. A firm hand was placed on his forehead and a voice spoke in French.

"Lie still. You must not try to get up. The blood from the wound on your head has frozen hard to the snow. I expect that stopped the bleeding and saved your life. But if you start it bleeding again——"

"But I must get up. The message *must* be delivered."

"Are *you* the messenger, then? I thought he was to start when you returned."

"Buon Dio! Who are you and what do you know of it?"

He caught the shoulder of the green coat and pulled it down; under the brown beaver and the fair curls of the wig he recognized the grey-hazel eyes, and cried:

"What do *you* here and in that guise?"

In a few words Margaret told him what she had overheard, how she had drugged Royland and ridden in his stead, but failed to get the papers.

"The game is up," said Piero, "if our plan is known. Was it Fraser who caught me here and left me for dead? He wore a grey cloak and rode a black horse, I think, with one white stocking."

"Then it was he."

He put his hand to the breast of his coat; his pockets had all been emptied, and the contents lay scattered on the snow round him. He laughed weakly.

"I carried nothing. Yes, the King's ring. It was on the little finger of my left hand. Is it safe? I cannot move that arm. It must be broken, for it doubled up under me when I fell."

As gently as she could, Margaret lifted him a little and drew the arm from under him, then, as he nearly fainted from the pain, she poured the rest of the whiskey from the flask down his throat. As she lifted her head a gleam from a snowdrift on the further side of the road caught her eyes, and pulling the pistol from her holster, she cocked and fired it with a shaking hand. When the smoke cleared the snow had been dislodged and she saw the point of a rapier whose hilt and blade were imbedded in the drift. She drew it out and saw on the blade a small fragment of grey woollen stuff.

"That is mine," said Piero; "and the piece from his cloak. But the ring?"

"It is there, safe, on your finger. If you had not fallen with it under you so, he must have found and taken it. Alan must have discovered Royland drugged and ridden himself to Perth. I wonder the captain at the gate let me through."

"Then the trap is baited for the King. You must go and warn him, Mademoiselle. Waste no more time."

"I cannot leave you here."

"You must! You shall! Mount at once. Go, or you may be too late!"

"You will die of cold."

"What matter, so the King is saved?"

"All's bolted and barred, and none in the farm. I tried for help when I found you and thought you dead."

"Go, only go!"

"If I could get you on to my horse; your own has gone."

"Impossible! You must ride alone and swiftly. You know sign and countersign? Ask for the King."

"Will they let me to him, not knowing me?"

"Take his ring from my finger. Guard it as yourself. Tell none but him, or failing him, Monsieur de St. Etienne. Now go, go, go!"

She turned to old Spey when she had taken the ring, then looked back. Piero's eyes had closed; the crescent of heavy lashes lay inky black on the deathly pallor of his cheeks; his wounded hand had struck cold as death when she had drawn off the ring. She could not desert him, leave him here to almost certain death. She flung herself on her knees beside him, wrapped his purple cloak about him, her own grey frieze over that, took his icy right hand and chafed it between her own warm palms. His lashes

flickered; he looked through and beyond her, then his eyes focussed on her and blazed.

"You?" he whispered. "You still here?"

"I can't leave you like this."

"I know you for what you are, a traitress!"

She dropped his hand and drew away, as he continued:

"You will not go to save the King. It was you betrayed me. Fool that I was to say even so much to a woman!"

"You believe I betrayed you?" she cried, springing to her feet.

"Judas should have been a woman. Fool that I was, thrice damned fool!"

She picked up the pistol, thrust it back into the holster, and put one foot into the stirrup, shivering, for she felt as if she had been stripped and exposed to the jeering crowd below the gallows. Those burning eyes of hate and scorn in the mask of death, those searing words on the blue writhing lips flayed her as if with lashes of flame.

Once more she looked back. Piero lay motionless, eyes closed, scarce a fluttering of breath at the parted lips. She bent quickly, put his right hand on the hilt of his rapier. His lips moved, but she could only catch a word or two of Italian, hardly breathed into the still air:

"Maria . . . Cuore mio . . ."

Then all was still.

2

Margaret felt that she was in the grip of one of those nightmares when all sense of time and space is swallowed up in nameless terror of an invisible, intangible evil from which the dreamer is powerless to escape. The cold penetrated the thin cloth of her coat and the

fine lawn of the shirt till flesh and blood, bone and marrow felt stiff, and mind and heart were numb too as lifeless automata. In her ears, as if in the dinning of a pulse, beat Piero's scathing words, again and yet again.

"Traitress! It was you who betrayed me. Judas should have been a woman!" Then those three, scarcely audible words: *"Maria . . . Cuore mio."* A woman's name and "my heart." Before her eyes was his face as she had last seen it, chiselled in the moonlight with the austere beauty of a Greek mask, its whiteness stained only by the black sweep of brows and lashes. Fiercely she forced herself to look at outward things, the steel sky that enshrined the cruel, brilliant moon, the steel of frozen river and sparkling sea, the iron-bound world in which no living thing stirred, a world stiff in the rigor of death.

A jingle of bridles and murmur of talk round the next bend of the road caught her ear, and she dismounted and led old Spey behind a clump of holly bushes, covering his eyes with her coat lest he should betray her by whinnying to the other horses. A little troop of Highlanders came into sight, riding carelessly and talking in Gaelic so low that she could not gather who they were nor on what errand bent. She waited till they were out of sight along the Dundee road, with the old horse's weary head pressed against her side, his laboured breathing under the coat sending a little warmth through her. As she was about to mount again, she hesitated, torn by doubt whether she should have hailed them and asked them to succour the Prince, or whether by doing so she would have betrayed her own trust and brought swifter death on him. Then she seemed to hear his voice: "Go! Go! Go!" and set out again towards Perth.

About a mile from Scoon Spey stumbled; she pulled

him together and urged him to a faster pace, then, without warning, he crumpled under her and came down so quickly that she only just managed to fall clear. She staggered to her feet with the rein still in her hand and called to him. The liquid reproachful eyes met hers, the grey head was lifted, then, with a shuddering sigh sank again into the snow. The faithful heart, which had served till its last beat, was stilled for ever. Margaret kissed the velvet nose and, with eyes blinded with tears, began to run towards the light which shone across the snow from Scoon. Her breath came in great sobs; her heart hammered till it felt that head and breast must burst. She could never remember clearly how she reached her goal, gave sign and countersign correctly and was finally led into an ante-room by a guard who bade her wait while he fetched Captain Price.

With that name her brain, which had been numb and apparently incapable of thought, asserted itself. Captain Price, that was Fraser's confederate, and her chances of getting through to the King grew very remote. She rose from the chair by the fire with a vague idea of rushing in search of the King, when the door opened and a man came in with a beak of a nose and dark eyes set close together.

"You will give me your message," he said curtly.

"Only to the King."

"I am ordered to take it."

"I am come from Alan Fraser on the business of cutting roses," she said, staking all on one bold throw.

Price seemed puzzled.

"How is that? He was here himself an hour or more ago and gave his orders."

"He gave you the sealed packet for the King?"

"If that is your business, you should know it. If not, no need for you to know."

"But I *must* see the King, at once, at once!"

"You will not show me your orders? Then you shall wait there till I see what is to be done."

He gave a rapid order to two Highlanders and slammed the door behind him.

Margaret, after a moment's delay, opened the door, only to find egress instantly barred by a couple of crossed pikes, while one of the men, who spoke a little English, informed her courteously enough that they had been forbidden to let her leave the room. The precious moments were slipping by; she paced to and fro like a caged beast. To be almost within sight and sound of the King yet unable to reach him was more than flesh and blood could bear patiently. Again she went to the door, and this time as she opened it a small man dressed in black with plain lawn cravat and ruffles was passing from one door of the outer room to the other with a parcel in his hand. It knocked against the corner of the table and he gave an angry exclamation in French, and at once Margaret called to him in that language.

"You are in the King's service?"

"But yes, Monsieur. I am François, his valet."

"I am held prisoner here by a mistake. I must see the King at once."

"Impossible, he is at the Council."

"It is a matter of urgency, vital, immediate."

"I can take a message."

"I must see the King himself, or failing that, Monsieur de St. Etienne."

"But how do I know the matter is of such urgency? Since you are kept here, there is no doubt some reason for the delay."

She held out her left hand, and his gaze sharpened behind the crossed pikes.

"*Mon dieu!* The King's signet-ring!"

"Is that enough proof for you?"

He vanished without reply and another interminable wait began. All these delays, and it might be too late to save the King or the Prince. Another thought stabbed her. Had she herself not made the first delay when she had lingered by the Prince? "Traitress!" he had branded her, and now she saw herself as one, faithless to the greatest and most passionate loyalties in that she had considered another before the King, had let another's need take precedence of the King's service.

There was the tap of a stick on the stone floor, and a moment later Monsieur de St. Etienne limped into the room, shutting the door behind him. He bowed, with his eyes on her left hand, which he lifted.

"*Permettez,* Monsieur; yes, it is indeed the King's signet which the Prince of Este wore."

"I rode from him to save the King. He is safe?"

"At the Council, or would have come himself. What news of the Prince?"

"For the love of God, Monsieur, send at once, for I left him for dead beside the ruined mill on the Dundee road. Send at once, and then I can tell you all."

Monsieur de St. Etienne disappeared with a swiftness surprising in one so lame, and now that the responsibility was no longer on her shoulders alone Margaret sank into a chair, feeling as if a too taut string had snapped. She was conscious of the Frenchman's return, then the room began to waver about her, and the next thing she knew was that she was lying back in her chair with someone holding a glass to her lips. She drank automatically, and lifted her eyes to meet Monsieur de St. Etienne's. His fine brows lifted a little and he smiled.

"That goes better, Mademoiselle Ogilvie?"

She sat up abruptly.

"You know me then?"

"There is surely not another pair of eyes like yours in Scotland."

His lawn ruffle caught on the arm of her chair as he took away the glass. His sleeve was pulled up and she saw that wrist and forearm were distorted and terribly scarred. He saw her look of horror and hastily pulled down his cuff while a faint colour came into his pale face.

A memory of old tales of torture and devilry came into her mind.

"The Inquisition?" she whispered with a shudder.

He gave a little laugh.

"But no. There is not always too much love between us and the children of St. Dominic, but these scars and my limp I got in China. But now, if you feel able, tell me of the King's peril."

He nodded once or twice during her story, put a pertinent question or two, then rose.

"I go to the King. This may affect the decision of the Council. But for you, Mademoiselle, what to do in this house of men? Let us consult François."

François, as usual, proved equal to the occasion, and within an hour Margaret was being tucked into bed by the wife of one of the Scoon Jacobites.

3

During the few moments when the King and Monsieur de St. Etienne spoke in low tones by the fire the arguments of the Council continued fitfully. Many looks were cast towards the King and the Frenchman by men furious at this foreign influence, hopeful of good news or fearful lest their dealings with the enemy were discovered. As Monsieur de St. Etienne limped quietly from the room the King returned to the head of

the table. Under his wig his face was very pale—a pallor in which the darkness of brows and eyes and the redness of his lips stood out in startling contrast.

"Gentlemen," he said very quietly, "before you announce your decision, I must tell you that the good news I had hoped to give you is the worst mine enemies could desire. Failure, defeat and treachery."

An angry murmur broke out, and as the King silenced it with a gesture his eyes flashed.

"Yes, treachery, I repeat; traitors even among those nearest to our person, and death to those dearest to us. Let those who forget their duty to us and are negligent of their own good be answerable for the worst that may happen."

Mar rose, but, before he could speak, the Marquis de Sarci leapt to his feet, and in a few impassioned words pleaded for advance, advance at all costs, to die fighting rather than be captured in flight. Gordon of Glenbucket, leader of the Marquis of Huntley's men, rose and supported his plea; but Mar, his face a dull purple with rage at the interruptions, silenced him, and announced that the decision of the majority had already been taken in favour of retreat.

"I must then accept your decision," said the King, his usually soft tones hard and stern; "I can only say that, whatsoever may ensue, I shall leave my faithful subjects no room for complaint that I have not done the utmost they could expect of me. To me it will be no new thing if I am unfortunate. My whole life, even from my cradle, has shown a constant series of misfortunes, and I am prepared, if it so please God, to suffer the threats of my enemies and yours."

He crossed again to the fire, leant against the high stone arch and gazed down on to the hearth where the golden tongues of flame were replaced by a heap of soft,

grey ashes. Dust and ashes, the vanity of human hopes, the swift passing of youth and dreams and love.

De Sarci, the last to leave the room, made as if he would have spoken, but something aloof, reserved, detached in the droop of head and hand stayed him; he left the room, and the King was alone.

There was a gentle knock at the door, and François came in.

"Sire, you should come to bed," he said gently. "You have not rested for two nights."

"What matter? We retreat to-day."

"Then it is the more necessary that your Majesty should have a few hours' sleep."

James lifted heavy eyes to where the uncurtained windows began to show paler than the dark panelling of the walls.

"It is already dawn. It is not worth while. Put out my riding things."

"The scarlet coat and waistcoat with the red leather boots? In this so sad country one needs colour, joy, warmth."

James turned haunted eyes. "Colour, joy, warmth," and Piero, who had been all that in his life, and how much more, lay dead in the snow under the pitiless moon.

"I care nothing, François. Do what you will. Red or black, purple or flame, it is all one to me."

He looked round at the sound of an uneven footstep, and as François went out Monsieur de St. Etienne came in and sat down in the chair James drew to the hearth for him.

"It is all over, *mon père,*" said James. "We retreat to-day. And Piero——"

His voice broke and he turned away his face before he added:

"My burden is greater than I can bear."

"'Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me,'" quoted Monsieur de St. Etienne gently. "But that is not all."

"Is not the rest too hard for human nature?"

"Not so, since it was human nature that endured the Agony in the Garden. Do you not desire to serve Him, and Him only, to follow as closely as you may in the footsteps of Him Whose Kingdom was not of this world?"

A memory rose vividly before James's eyes—himself a shy and frightened boy of thirteen, and in the great bed, behind the half-drawn curtains, his dying father, the death-sweat already dewing the lined forehead, the once beautiful eyes, the only live thing in the livid face, turned on him, the gasping, almost inaudible words, the last on earth of the exiled king: "Remember that God and religion are above all earthly interests."

He knew that he had never faltered from his determination to carry out his father's dying wish. Never had worldly interests influenced him to the prejudice of heavenly things. He remembered the pressure which had been brought to bear on him before the death of his half-sister Anne, indirectly from the Queen, directly from ministers such as the Duke of Buckingham, the Earl of Oxford, Viscount Bolingbroke, from practically all the Protestant, and even a few of the Catholic Jacobites. But never had he regretted for an instant his own firm and uncompromising refusal to countenance even a rumour that he would nominally accept the State religion and by concealing his own beliefs obtain the succession to the triple crown which his father had renounced "for a Mass."

He broke the silence in answer to Monsieur de St. Etienne's question.

"You know that I should not be here now on this venture but that I regard any attempt to regain my father's rights as a crusade undertaken for the Catholic Church. I think I can truly say: 'I preferred her before kingdoms and thrones and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her.'"

Then the present returned with its poignant agony of heart and mind, and humanity cried out.

"Piero!" he exclaimed. "God asks so much."

"Nay, He asks only one thing," the gentle voice answered: "that His Will may be done in and by you; that your human will may be irrevocably fixed to the Divine Will even as our Blessed Lord was nailed upon the Cross."

The silence was broken by a heavy footstep; the door was opened noisily and Mar came in with a handful of papers.

"The orders for the retreat for your Majesty's signature," he said bluntly, casting a furtive look of dislike at Monsieur de St. Etienne as he limped from the room.

James sat down, blew out one candle which was guttering in its socket, snuffed another, and took up the quill.

"The date?" he asked in a cold, impassive voice.

"January 30."

James paused, with the ink dripping from the pen, while a cold breath seemed to pass through the room. On that day, sixty-seven years before, his grandfather had stepped from the banqueting-hall on to the scaffold in Whitehall. The doom of his race overshadowed him; there was no escape.

He signed the papers without a word, handed them to Mar, motioned to him to go, then sat as if turned to stone till a sudden shouting in the street drew him to the window. The dawn was breaking, and he saw a

group of Highlanders pressing about a chief; he fancied it was Gordon of Glenbucket, but could not see his face, and in the dim grey light the tartan was indistinguishable. He could not understand the Gaelic, but voices, gestures and faces interpreted it, and some cried in English.

"What were we called to arms for, to run away? What did the King come hither for? Was it to see his people butchered by hangmen and not strike one blow for their lives? Let us die like men and not like dogs!"

"By God!" cried their chief, "if he were willing to die like a prince he should find there were ten thousand gentlemen in Scotland who fear not to die with him! But now——"

He flung out his arms in a comprehensive gesture of scorn and despair, drew his claymore, broke it across his knee and flung point and hilt away over the heads of the crowd.

"Away with thee! For, since I may no longer draw thee for the King, thou art but a broken reed!"

As the flash of steel was buried in snow, James laid his hand upon the casement to fling it open, leap out among his loyal Highlanders and cry:

"Here am I, your King, willing to fight beside you, asking no better fate than to die with and for you!"

But the lead of the casement was frozen hard to the stone mullion, and while the King struggled with it a wild figure appeared on the mounting block outside the door, tangled grey locks flying about the tattered rags that barely covered the bony shoulders, with mad eyes ablaze in the cadaverous face.

"To your tents, O Israel!" wailed the daft Covenanter. "Every man to his own city and every man to his own country! For I did see you scattered upon the mountains like sheep that have no shepherd and the Lord said:

'These have no master, let them return therefore every man to his house in peace.' "

The chief in fury turned and swept him from his perch, but the clansmen, huddled together in awed silence, as if warned by a voice of doom from beyond the veil, vanished swiftly and silently as the morning mists.

The King stood motionless, staring into the now empty street, then the touch of something warm and soft on his right hand roused him and he looked down to find his silver greyhound licking the blood which had spurted unnoticed when he struck his knuckles against the stone of the window. He bent and laid his cheek against the satin-smooth head.

"Ah, Minette," he said, with a little laugh, "of all my friends and followers art thou the only one left me?"

The last candle was flaring out; James crossed the room, extinguished it, then sank into the chair at the head of the table, while Minette laid her head upon his knee, gazing up at him with adoring lustrous eyes. He sat, elbows on table, chin cupped in hands, while the blood trickled unheeded onto his lace ruffle. In his utter loneliness and desolation his heart, like that of a home-sick child, went out to his mother—that beautiful, selfless, understanding Queen whose love and sympathy had never failed him, who had dried his rare childish tears, protected his nervous, highly-strung boyhood from his stern father, had inspired, encouraged and directed the adventures of his youth and manhood.

He laid his head down upon his outstretched hands and his lips formed the familiar words of the *Memorare,* that deathless appeal to the unfailing pity of the Almoner of God which had healed and comforted the bruised and broken hearts of suppliant men for six hundred years. He fancied that a gracious Presence stood beside him, that a fragrance of violets and roses stole upon the frozen

air, that the grey light of bitter dawn warmed to a divine and golden radiance.

He did not know how long he had slept, when he felt a strong hand touch him, a smooth cheek against his, while a low voice murmured an Italian endearment. He stiffened; his hands clenched, crumpling the papers on the table, but he would not open his eyes.

"Madre di Dio!" he whispered, "let me sleep on, lest the dream end!"

There was a little laugh and an answering whisper at his ear.

"So you are awake at last, *caro mio.* I would not spoil your dream. It is I in the flesh, no ghost. Feel and see!"

James leapt to his feet, dazed and incredulous. Before him stood the Prince of Este, very pale, his head swathed in a white bandage, his left hand and arm strapped to his breast, but with a light in his eyes and a smile on his lips that were all of flesh and blood.

"Piero!" cried the King. "Piero! You are alive after all!"

"It takes more than a split head and broken arm to kill a d'Este, *carissimo.*"

James took one step forward, and Piero's uninjured arm was about him.

CHAPTER VII

LOOKED UPON PETER

Already the stormy dusk was falling, so Margaret put up her distaff and sat looking idly from the window on to the tossing grey waves of the North Sea. She could scarcely believe that this was Saturday, February 4, and that less than a week ago she had come home from the Auld Kirk at Dundee, as she had done every Sabbath since she could remember, unconscious that the whole of her old life was to shatter about her in a few hours. Yet little more than twelve hours—from the time that Piero d'Este had followed her into the house till the time when Monsieur de St. Etienne had given her into François' charge—had held the crowded adventures of her life; adventures, she thought bitterly, never likely to recur. She had been awakened at noon next day by her hostess, who handed her a parcel of her clothes brought by Master Forbes. He had just arrived, having driven straight on to Scoon after his return from Lady Scrymgeour's death-bed, and Margaret had winced under his stern looks and few cold words. As she huddled after him into the coach and they set out to Dundee she felt more like a truant schoolgirl than a heroine of high romance. She volunteered one remark about the emptiness of the streets.

"The Chevalier is in retreat," Master Forbes had answered shortly; "with his Grace of Argyle and General Cadogan hot on his heels, and since Dundee will be no place for two unprotected girls with a disordered and

undisciplined army passing through the town in full flight, I am changing horses at home, and if Elsie is well enough, pushing straight on to leave her and you in Janet's charge with my Aunt Jean at Montrose."

Since their arrival at Montrose no news had penetrated from the outside world. Though Elsie was now better, she was still in bed—rather to Margaret's relief. Aunt Jean was stone deaf, and but that her hands flashed to and fro all day knitting interminable stockings and vests, she might have been an image carved out of hard wood. Janet had little to say; her master's rare, but cold anger had awed even her intrepid spirit. In answer to Margaret's enquiries that morning she replied that she knew only that the King had ridden out of Perth across the frozen Tay; it was said "with tears in his eyes," his only words that: "Instead of bringing him to a Crown they had brought him to his Grave."

Margaret had broken out indignantly:

"He will never submit, Janet; even now it is not too late for fortune to return. Perhaps the retreat is only a feint. Cannot you go out and get news?"

"They'll nae let me oot of the hoose," Janet had said; "and for the auld mon and his wife, they micht be as dumb as the mistress is deaf."

Margaret sat motionless in the deepening dusk, her hands folded on her lap, her spinning wheel idle by her. She could just distinguish a small French sloop of about ninety ton, tossing at anchorage in the bay; then, as night fell, she could see no more than the small yellow light winking at the mast-head. She saw life stretching ahead, an interminable vista of grey and empty years, knew that she had never lived at all save that day the King had entered Dundee, and that other day when she had ridden to save him. She saw again the swift

look that had passed between him and the Prince at Gorntully, which had taught her the existence of a whole world hitherto unknown to her. She heard again that *cri de cœur* from Piero: "What matter if *I* die so the King is saved?" In her twenty-five years of life she had known no personal feeling stronger than her respectful affection for her uncle, her protective, patronizing affection for Elsie, her childish sentiment for Janet. Her strongest romance had been devotion for the King, as symbol of the Cause rather than as a man, of whom she knew nothing. And suddenly in those two short days there had been revealed to her the possibility of love so passionate, so faithful, so selfless, that beside it all else in the world was but as a little dust. And having caught this glimpse of such a heaven, must she now spend life in a dreary round of dull monotony to end only in the distant grave?

She heard the door open and saw a man, but could not distinguish if it were Master Forbes, who was expected back from Edinburgh to-night. She rose, threw another log on to the fire and reached for flint and tinder.

"I did not know it was so late," she said. "Wait till I light a candle."

The man came in without speaking and shut the door. The tinder would not light at first, so she bent down to blow the spark to a blaze, and held the lighted splinter of wood to the candles on the table. Then by their light she saw the King. Above the scarlet, gold-laced coat his face was white as the lace at his throat; the hazel eyes were heavy-lidded and dark-rimmed with weariness; there were shadows at temple and cheek that had not been there a month before.

"Mistress Ogilvie," said that soft, low voice, "I have

come to thank you in person, since I could not do so that night you rode to Scoon to save me."

"You were kept at the Council that decided on a dastardly retreat."

"What other course was open?"

She took a step towards him, where he stood the other side of the fire and spoke low but passionately.

"Surely to cast caution to the four winds, to show yourself as something more than a shadow-king, to be a worthy son of your race, to lead your loyal men to victory or death."

"Things are not so easy as that. There are more to consider than oneself."

"Courage, not consideration, Sire; cold steel, not quill pens, is what we need. Can you hear the skirl of the pipes, see the swing of kilts, the flash of loyal claymores and dirks that thirst for enemy blood, and yet can you remain cold and aloof?"

His sensitive nostrils quivered and a slow colour crept into his face.

"One would almost fancy you thought me afraid, Mistress; faint-hearted as well as cold-blooded."

"It is not yet too late," she cried. "Put yourself at the head of the clans, Sire; turn and drive Dutch and German mercenaries into the sea!"

"It *is* too late," he answered, going to the window. "Do you see that light in the bay?"

"'Tis at the mast of a French ship."

"The Marie Thérèse of St. Malo."

"What of it?"

"Within an hour I shall be aboard, and at the turning of the tide we sail for France."

Margaret put a hand to her throat; for a moment the blood drummed so loudly in her ears that she could scarcely make out the King's words.

"I was ready, I am still ready, to share every hardship, every danger, even to death, with those who have sacrificed all for me. The only argument which has persuaded me to consent to leave them is this: my presence now, far from being a help and support to them, will rather hasten their ruin. While I am still among my loyal Highlanders they will be pursued and, if possible, exterminated, to the last man. When I am gone it will be impossible for the enemy to follow a disbanded army as it vanishes among the snowclad hills and valleys."

His voice suddenly broke; he held out his beautiful hands in an appealing gesture.

"Mademoiselle, to me you are Scotland. Tell me that you understand, that you do not blame me for this decision which has felt to me as if my living heart were torn from me."

There was a moment's silence, broken by the cheerful crackle of the wood fire within, the howling of the wind and breaking of the waves against the granite wall of the harbour without.

Then suddenly a torrent of passionate words poured from Margaret.

"You say that to you I stand for Scotland? Then listen to Scotland's verdict on a failure and a weakling! To me, as to how many others, you have been a prince of dreams, since my baby lips could speak your name, my baby hands pluck a white rose to wear at my breast. Child, girl, and woman, I have lived only to serve you. Every day, every night, I have prayed that some day you might come to your own and win back your lost crown. At last you came. I saw you, heard you, kissed your hand. You seemed all I had dreamed of—a fairy prince of dew and flame in a grey cold world. Then fate gave me the chance to save you. I risked all, sacrificed. . . . But enough! You are but a king of shadows, an empty

puppet that can neither do nor dare. Dare you cast caution to cowards, and win through or die, sword in hand, at the head of your brave Highlanders? Nay, you retreat, protesting perhaps, when we need deeds not words! And now you slip away like a thief in the night, ashamed, afraid, leaving others to suffer for your follies and blunders, to bear the penalty of your weakness. That is what Scotland thinks of you!"

For the first time he moved, took something from his breast and threw it into the fire, then spoke in a quiet, low tone.

"Since that is your verdict, Mademoiselle, nothing remains but to bid you farewell."

He moved away, and in the doorway Margaret saw Piero d'Este. He followed the King out, and shut the door. Margaret stood as if turned to stone till a little flicker at the edge of the hearth caught her eye. She remembered that the King had flung something into the fire, fell on her knees, crushed out the sparks and pressed to her breast the charred remains of her rose which the King had worn above his heart. An overwhelming flood of remorse for her outburst swept her out of herself and at the slamming of the street door she rushed to the window and threw open the casement.

In the wavering light of the torch above the door she saw the King, muffled in a black cloak lined with scarlet, fighting his way against the wind. As he passed out of sight a gust caught the Prince's purple cloak, flinging it out like a gonfalon. His attention caught by the sound of the opening window, he looked up. His eyes met Margaret's and she drew back shuddering, her face hidden in her hands, familiar words in her ears:

"The Lord turned and looked upon Peter. . . . And Peter went out and wept bitterly."

PART II. PARIS

FEBRUARY 25—MAY, 1716

CHAPTER I

SILK AND STEEL

THAT nest of Jacobitism, Mademoiselle de Chausseraye's little house in the Bois de Boulogne, was gaily lit on the evening of February 25, 1716. Dozens of candles burned in gilt sconces on the ivory-panelled walls and a fire of cherry-wood crackled in cheerful contrast to the sound of steady rain outside. The room was full of women; Mademoiselle herself, small, plump and tender as a pigeon, was cooing to the Marquise de Mézières, who reclined languidly on the sofa between her two sisters, Anne and Fanny Oglethorpe, while Olive Trant sat near the fire, her handsome dark colouring and noble figure contrasting with the red hair and sinuous grace of Louise Granby, who stood by her.

A man's step was heard coming along the flagged path from the garden-gate to the side door, and Mademoiselle rose with a rustle of silk.

"I have sent all the servants out, so I will open the door. I expect it is the Baron de Spaar."

"Do we then await the Swedish Ambassador?" asked Louise Granby as Mademoiselle went out with the soft rush of a bird in flight.

"And the Spanish Prince Cellamare," nodded Olive Trant. Then, at the sound of a voice in the hall, she flushed.

"The Prince d'Auvergne," murmured the Marquise. "Olive, *chérie,* 'tis not the White Rose *he* comes to pluck."

"None the less he is one of us with his whole heart."

"Hast thou then only the fragments?"

"What news?" asked Henri, Prince d'Auvergne, as he warmed his hands after having greeted the women and been presented to Louise.

"Little," cooed Mademoiselle de Chausseraye, "but that good. We know His Majesty landed safely in Scotland, advanced without opposition to Perth, was crowned, and by his presence has turned the tide of fortune. We had hoped by now to hear he was in Edinburgh, even on his way to London, but storms have delayed the shipping."

More footsteps were heard, and two voices, one loud and hilarious, one expostulating. Mademoiselle again fluttered out, while the Prince d'Auvergne tapped his jewelled snuff-box with an air of disgust as he sat down beside Olive.

"Parbleu! If he has brought that woman with him, it is too much."

She laid her hand on his arm and smiled at him.

"Mon cher, Harry is seldom sober these days, and generally takes her out with him."

"If that were all, 'tis enough, but 'tis thought he hath a foot in both camps."

"I know," she answered in a low tone, "that the King, immediately on his arrival in Scotland, sent General George Hamilton to Paris with the message that the enterprise was hopeless and must be instantly abandoned unless arms and powder were forwarded without delay. But Lord Bolingbroke dallied for a fortnight and did not even trouble to send on the letters to the Queen for twelve days."

Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, stumbled on the doorstep, straightened his fair wig and stood swaying in the doorway, his fat face flushed, his small sensual mouth fixed in a maudlin smile, while the round

blue eyes, set too near the long nose, beamed on the company.

"Sharming, sharming!" he gurgled. "So many fair nymphs—five, is it; or do I see double? *Monsieur le Prince,* I can allow no mono- mono-policies!"

He bowed precariously to the rest, sank heavily onto a chair next Olive, and was fumbling for her hand to kiss when the Prince took it and pulled her to her feet.

"Time presses," he said. "Will you let me out of the side door, *chérie?*"

In the hall they found Mademoiselle de Chausseraye talking to Baron de Spaar, the Swedish Ambassador.

"I infinitely regret, Mademoiselle," he said, "that these unexpected despatches demand an answer to-night, so that it is impossible for me to wait and confer with Prince Cellamare about the expedition to be sent to Scotland. As you know, the matter is one for delicate diplomacy rather than haste, as a trade treaty is in process of discussion between Spain and England, and his Eminence Cardinal Alberoni is scarce likely at the moment to commit himself to any course that may compromise him with the King.... I mean the Elector and the British Government."

"But your master, King Charles XII, desires to regain the Duchies of Bremen and Verden which the Elector has filched from Sweden," smiled Olive: "So, apart from considerations of right and wrong, it is to his interest to stand in with us and see King James on the English throne."

"This talk of an invasion of Scotland by a Swedish force," began Mademoiselle, but was interrupted by the Baron, who was drawing on his long gloves.

"Mademoiselle, one should not place too much reliance on idle rumour."

"We hope by now," replied Mademoiselle with dignity, "that such foreign aid is unnecessary."

There was a shout from within and as the Ambassador was going out Bolingbroke caught him by the arm.

"Zounds, man what's the haste? Sheems I'm not too popular; no shance of supplanting sh'King in this garden of roshes."

He pointed a fat finger at Mademoiselle's then at Olive's breast, where each wore a miniature of James.

"Swhite rose," he gurgled: "lucky dog, such a warm nest, shnow drifts roshes! Where's Marthe? I want Marthe! Nobody elshe sloves me!"

He was pushed out into the rain on the Baron's heels, still babbling, with tears of self-pity beginning to trickle down his fat cheeks, and the two women rejoined the others.

There was a momentary silence, in which the rain sounded, steady, pitiless.

Olive shivered.

"The rain sounds like falling tears," she said.

"Or dripping blood," answered Louise Granby, lifting tawny lashes.

The Marquise rose and shook out her skirts with a rustle of silk that drowned the rain.

"*Mon dieu!* how dreary we are!" she cried: "an evening that has entirely missed fire!"

Louise gave a little sly smile.

"Naturally, Madame la Marquise. Six women and not a man, what would you? But I think I hear a man's step now."

There was a quick light step on the path, and a low knock, thrice repeated. Mademoiselle turned pale and put her hands to her breast.

"'Tis *his* knock!" she whispered. "Who can it be? I dare not go."

Olive left the room; the others heard the outer door being unlocked, then the draft blew open the door into

the room, and they saw a tall man's figure outlined against the night; his black cloak, lined with scarlet, was dripping onto the doorstep; the long scarlet feather in his black three-cornered hat, was lank and drenched too. There was an instant of breathless silence, while he came in and took off his hat. His face was hidden as he bent over Olive's hand, then she stood aside and he paused in the doorway of the room.

There was a stifled scream from the Oglethorpes, an exclamation from the Marquise, a cry from Mademoiselle de Chausseraye, who sank onto her knees, crossing herself, and hid her face in her hands. Only Louise of the five women in the room remained silent where she stood by the fire, but the creamy pallor of her face turned chalky-white, and her green eyes darkened almost to black, while the breath came quickly between her parted red lips, as, for the first time, she looked on the face of James Francis Stuart.

He wore the scarlet coat in which he had ridden out of Perth, stained and faded where the salt spray of the stormy North Sea had dashed over him; his high scarlet riding boots were caked with mud; he wore his own hair, the short dark curls clung wet and shining to his forehead, and he was very pale. His cloak slipped from him and lay in a soaking heap at his feet till Olive picked it up.

"The King," she said quietly. "Sire, go in and warm yourself."

"It appears, Madame la Marquise and Mesdemoiselles, that my return does not inspire you with enthusiasm. I share your feelings."

Mademoiselle rose from her knees only to sink onto them again as she seized his hand.

"Grand Dieu! It is indeed yourself, Sire, and no *revenant."*

"Revenant?" he said with a touch of bitterness. "But

yes, since as you see I have been forced to return. If other ghosts come back as unwillingly as I do, few visits from them are to be feared."

As each woman in turn knelt to kiss his hand James saw himself look out from every white breast, with the multiplied unreality of a dream. The heavy wig, long hazel eyes, clear olive skin, smiling mouth with pouting underlip—they throbbed with the beating of six excited hearts, rose and fell with six eager breaths; in six pair of eyes glowed devotion, enthusiasm, curiosity, awakened passion. There was a confused babble, questions, exclamations, gossip, news, enquiries and suddenly, through this atmosphere heavy with adulation, flattery, fervour, intrigue, the King saw Margaret's face as he had last seen it—pale, passionate, with blazing eyes. He heard her voice, low, quivering: "A king of shadows, an empty puppet that can neither do nor dare."

The women closed about him and he sat down in the great chair which Mademoiselle drew to the hearth for him, and in answer to their questions, told them of the retreat from Perth, the stormy voyage from Montrose to Dunkerque, the forced ride to Paris, through wind and mud and rain.

"What ill chance!" cried Mademoiselle. "You should have found both the Swedish and Spanish ambassadors here to-night, but the Baron could not stay, and Prince Cellamare has not come."

"They told me at Lord Bolingbroke's lodgings that you expected the two ambassadors this evening."

"How did they know? I told none. Lord Bolingbroke was here himself but now with Baron de Spaar. If he had known you were coming, Sire——"

The King's mouth tightened.

"As well perhaps that he did not. I think I hear a coach outside."

The Marquise rose, with an arm about each sister.

"It is Clarice de Sarci, Sire. She promised to fetch us on her way home from the Palais Royal."

"Jules was with me on the Marie Thérèse," said the King. "Tell Mademoiselle de Sarci she may expect her brother home within a day or two."

For a moment the King was left alone with Louise Granby. He was standing, lost in thought, looking into the fire, when he felt his right hand seized and held to a pair of warm, clinging lips. He turned, startled, to find Louise kneeling at his feet, her green eyes dark with emotion, the firelight caressing her copper curls, the creamy smoothness of cheek and throat.

"We have not met before, Mademoiselle. You are a new recruit to our ranks."

"Do not fresh fires burn the more fiercely, Sire? My heart beats only for you; in my breast is room for none but you."

She held his hand to her breast, so that he felt its quick rise and fall, the strong throbbing of her heart. His face coloured and he drew his hand quickly away. She rose swiftly to her feet as Piero d'Este came in, throwing a glance at the King over her head, half-amused, half-ironical. She slipped unnoticed from the room while Mademoiselle and Olive brought in pasties, sweetmeats, wine and glasses.

"Most divine Hebe," smiled Piero, at Olive, who sat down by him, "never did I love you so dearly as now."

"The short cut to a man's heart is through his stomach," she laughed.

"Will you do something more for me—cut up my food?"

"How were you hurt?" she cried, catching sight of his bandaged hand. "Oh, Piero, it is not disabled for always? You will still be able to play your violin?"

"In time, so the leech said at Perth. He told me I should probably have lost it altogether if it had not been well washed and bandaged so soon."

"By a woman? You are indeed in her debt, *mon cher.*"

"So deeply that it would give me the greatest pleasure in the world to feel my blade in her heart," he answered grimly. "I do not think I knew before what it is really to hate."

He put down his empty glass and stared into the fire; under his long, curling lashes his golden eyes had darkened.

"Have a care," said Olive. "Such hate is often only the reverse of love."

He turned scornfully.

"Have you ever yet known me love a woman?"

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-six—a year younger than the King."

"Again I warn you, *mon ami.* Late come, ne'er cured."

He laughed, filling his glass and raising it to her.

"*A vos beaux yeux, chérie!* Is not my hopeless passion for you protection enough against other women?"

"Henri will be jealous."

"You flatter me. *Mon dieu!* It is late. If I can tear the King from the little Mademoiselle and the fire I must go."

"Whither?"

"He to St. Germains, I elsewhere. *Ma chère,* I like not your new nymph."

"She came from England a week or two ago with letters from Lord Oxford in the Tower to Lord Bolingbroke."

"Bolingbroke!" Piero shrugged and snapped his fingers expressively: "After our month in Scotland one should be able to scent a traitor."

François was waiting with the horses under the shelter of an arch near by. The King masked, mounted, then held out his hand to Piero.

"*A riverderci, caro mio,*" he said. "Be no longer than you must. Without you I am less than half myself."

Piero stooped and kissed the beautiful hand, which wore no ring but the great diamond signet.

"Lend me your ring and cloak, *Jacopo mio,* and take mine in exchange. Why? A fancy that I should have something of yours to take with me."

He drew off his own square emerald, slipped it onto the King's hand, and flung the old purple cloak about the shoulders of the scarlet coat.

The King laid a hand on his shoulder and gave him a long, searching look.

"You have no other reason, know of no danger that you would draw from me onto yourself? You can use only one hand, and I would rather a thousand times that ill befell me than you."

Piero laughed.

"Scotland has bred dreams and fancies in you. If you fear for me, let François ride with me as far as Sainte Geneviève, and you go the way we arranged to the Porte Neuilly."

"Pardon, *mon Prince,*" said François doggedly. "I cannot leave His Majesty."

Piero fumbled with one hand at his mask while Sancho, the King's black horse, fidgeted into the street.

"François, I cannot fix this with one hand."

Then, in a quick whisper, as the valet's deft hands were at his head:

"Fool! Don't you see that, unless you are with me they will never take me for the King? You can rejoin him in half an hour, unless——"

He mounted and rejoined the King who spoke.

"I am happier, since François goes with you. You have my cloak, and will be wetter with than without it. Here is the ring."

"Also I have Roxane," Piero laughed softly. *"Dio!* It was a fight to get the captain of the Marie Thérèse to take her as well as Sancho."

He laid his hand on the King's shoulder.

Till we meet again, *cuore mio*—here or there."

He mounted, waited a moment till the King was out of sight, then turned in the opposite direction.

"There is treachery afoot, *mon Prince?"* asked François.

"I *know* nothing, François, but I feel it. We ride straight for the Porte Neuilly, and if I am captured, do you rejoin the King at once without waiting to try and help me. I shall get out of it somehow. My luck has never failed me yet."

"I can use my blade," mused François, drawing it and running his finger along the edge; "and I should not care to face the King and tell him I had left you."

"Tell him you obeyed orders. A thousand devils! What is that?"

Roxane shied suddenly and just avoided stumbling over a huddled figure at the foot of some steps. Both rapiers flashed, then the figure was shaken by a long shuddering sob, followed by a storm of tears.

"A woman!" exclaimed Piero. "What is wrong, Mademoiselle?"

The head under the hood was shaken; the face was hidden in white hands and the sobs redoubled. Piero dismounted, sheathed his sword, and bending, laid a hand on her shoulder, regardless of François' word of warning. A fiercer paroxysm made the hood slip a little so that a glimpse of hair showed in the uncertain light of the torch above the door. Piero fancied it was a gleam of red; instantly his mind flew to Louise Granby and his hand

to his sword, but too late. He was already surrounded; two men appeared as if by magic from the door, two slipped between him and François, and before he could draw he was overpowered and his hands pinioned behind his back. Before he was gagged he gave a fierce shout to François to be gone, and an instant later the drumming sound of hoofs on cobbles showed that the valet had made good his escape.

Blindfolded, gagged and bound, Piero was lifted onto a horse, then, as one of his captors broke silence for the first time to his amazement he heard a sharp order given in Scotch. As the little troop clattered along the silent street a foreboding crept over him which dimmed his exultance in the success of his stratagem and chilled his blood. It must be Lord Stair's men who had caught him —Stair, the new British ambassador at Paris, who had not scrupled to attempt the King's assassination at Bar-le-Duc, who would bar no means to attain his own sinister ends.

Piero remembered tales he had heard in Scotland of this man's grandfather, whose family had been haunted by dreadful doom and terrible death, whose wife was known as the witch of Endor and, some said, had been burnt at the stake for crimes too blasphemous to be told. They whispered in Lowland cots and Highland but-and-bens that the father of her son—this ambassador's father, who had planned and executed the massacre of Glencoe —was not John Dalrymple, first Viscount Stair, but the devil himself, and that in the veins of this man ran not human blood but hell-fire.

Piero forced himself to laugh, but that little chill foreboding would not be dispersed. He had told François that his luck had never failed him yet; but was fortune not a woman and proverbially inconstant? He knew that if he had indeed fallen into the hands of Stair he was

scarce likely to leave them alive. If rumour whispered true, he was even likely to pray for death as a merciful deliverer—to pray, but not to be heard.

Then he remembered the poison in his ring—his ring that was on the King's finger, and he hoped, by now safe outside the walls of Paris.

A halt was made, for the man leading his mount, which he fancied to be Roxane, checked suddenly. There was a quick interchange of word and password, the sound of bolts being shot back, iron bars falling with a clang, and of a gate being opened. He was lifted and set down on wet stones so roughly that he almost lost his footing, staggered forward against a horse's shoulder, and knew by the little whinny and soft nuzzle that it was his own mare. He tried by rubbing his face against her to push up the bandage which blinded him. It was too securely tied, and had caught on his mask, which his captors had not troubled to remove. Two of the men began to talk in low tones—to his great joy in French.

"What is the delay?" asked one.

"Jock has gone in to get directions from the captain."

"The ambassador is not back yet, then?"

"He must have been kept at the Palais Royal, for milor has been waiting for him an hour or more. Jock does not know that I understand them."

"Knowledge is worth money, *mon vieux,* so keep a still tongue. *Diable!* It is wet and cold. These savages might at least take their King into the dry and us also."

Piero silently assented. The King's cloak, wet when he had put it on, felt now like frozen lead about his shoulders; he shook his head and a little cascade ran from each peak of his three-cornered hat; the water went down the back of his neck in an icy trickle and in at the tops of his high riding boots. His wounded hand

was throbbing agonizingly with the tightness of the cords which bound his wrists behind him; the bandage pressed his mask into his forehead and rubbed his chin with its rough surface. The only redeeming feature in his physical discomfort was that he had managed to shift the gag enough to free his mouth.

Time dragged interminably; the silence was only broken by the steady swish of rain, the occasional stamping of an impatient horse, the fidgeting and murmurs of still more impatient men. Suddenly Piero remembered the small dagger he always kept hidden under the flap of Roxane's saddle. If he could reach it he could free his hands, the first step to complete freedom. He turned his back to Roxane, waited to see if his manœuvre had attracted attention, then tried to lift his hands behind him to the saddle. It was impossible, for the cord round his wrists had been fastened also round his waist, so that he could not lift them. At that moment a stir ran through the yard; he heard the men come smartly to attention. He recognized the voice of his captor, understood a word here and there—"Pretender" and "Valet"—then another voice spoke in bad French to the men beside him:

"The reward goes to you two, five thousand francs apiece. Bring him in."

A delighted murmur sounded. Piero was so roughly seized that his hat fell off. There was a startled exclamation, then bandage and mask were torn off and Piero found himself facing a tall thin young Scot, who turned and swore violently at "Jock" and then the two Frenchmen.

"Gad, man! Don't you know the Pretender? That's not him."

Jock and his Scotch companions muttered sulkily.

"We watched him leave de Chausseraye's house and

ride towards the Porte Neuilly with his valet, dressed, as we were told, in the black cloak lined with scarlet, and we saw the great diamond ring, for he wore no glove on his right hand. We followed to the place appointed and caught him as arranged."

"The valet?"

"Escaped."

"The Pretender must have been warned. And when the ambassador finds the mistake——"

Piero saw a shadow of fear darken the pale blue eyes opposite him, then the captain spoke again.

"Search him for arms and papers."

Piero stood unresisting while he was mauled from head to foot, even his soaking boots being pulled off. He kept his balance with difficulty, leaning against Roxane and thankful that he had been unable to reach the dagger, thankful too for every moment that passed and gave the King an additional start.

"Neither papers nor arms, captain."

"Bring him in. When Lord Stair returns he can tell of the Pretender's movements. If he will not, there are means to make him speak."

"And our reward?" asked one of the Frenchmen sulkily.

"Milord," said Jock, and the young commander turned as a man, masked with his cloak muffled to the brim of his hat, came from the house into the courtyard. In obedience to a sharp order the two Scots ran to the gate, which they began to unbar, and the captain accompanied the stranger across the yard. Something in the walk, uncertain as it was, struck a familiar note in Piero's memory, but immediate necessity came first. Pushing up the saddle-flap with his head he pulled out the dagger with his teeth, by a violent contortion managed to wriggle his hands round far enough to his left side to be able

to reach them with the long blade of the dagger, whose hilt was between his teeth. One touch of the razor edge and one cord had gone, then it was a matter of seconds to slip the rest and, as half the heavy gate opened to allow the exit of the stranger, Piero was on Roxane and she had started across the yard. One of the Frenchmen rushed to her head with a shout, just too late, the other slipped and fell on the wet flags. One of the Scots at the gate leapt at Roxane's rein, but a sharp touch on the bit set her rearing; she caught him under her fore-hoofs as she came down, and trampled him screaming under her hind hoofs as she shot forward. The captain raised a pistol and fired point-blank, but the wet powder failed to catch; the last man struggled to pull to the gate, but as it began to close Piero was through. The masked guest, who had jumped into the street, lunged at him, but with his left hand Piero struck him full on the point of the chin, and looking back saw him measure his length and lie still in the muddy gutter.

He gave a shout of triumph; he was confident of making good his escape now, and his left hand, sore and aching as it was from being bound, and now from the blow, had responded to his will as it had not done since the dagger cut nearly a month before.

He doubled sharply twice on his tracks to throw off pursuers; then, as he negotiated an acute corner, had barely time to rein Roxane onto her haunches to avoid collision with the leading horses of a heavy gilt coach. The postilion, nearly unseated by the plunging of his startled mount and its fellow, swore lustily. The coachman and footmen stared in amazement at Piero hatless, wigless, cloakless, his silk-stockinged feet in the stirrups, his short hair and green coat shining with wet; then as Roxane swept past the coach, Piero saw on the panel of the door the golden leopards of England, the red lion of

Scotland, the gold harp of Ireland. Through the rain-blurred window he caught sight of a pale, still face, and dark eyes whose glance made him shiver.

This time his luck had held, but if it did not next time —what then?

CHAPTER II

"ADIEU FOR EVERMORE"

THE King pulled up his tired horse at the summit of the steep climb to Bougival. The rain had ceased at last, and the moon peered fitfully through the low clouds, shining on the two arms of the Seine below him and the long, narrow islands they encircled. A mile behind him the chestnut wood of la Jonchère made a dark patch beside the road and in the distance, between him and Paris, rose the hill of Mont Valerian. Eight miles of wet riding lay behind him since he had left the walls of Paris; another four still lay between him and St. Germains-en-Laye, his mother and his home.

Sudden despair came upon him. Home? Not for him —an exile from his own kingdom, with a price upon his head, even the hospitable land of France was no longer officially open to him. His lip curled at the remembrance of the words in the "Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the Most Serene and Most Potent Princess Anne . . . Queen of Great Britain, France and Ireland . . . and the Most Christian King," Louis XIV, signed less than seven years before at Utrecht, and declaring that: "The Person who, in the lifetime of the late King James II, did take upon him the Title of Prince of Wales and since his decease that of King of Great Britain . . . shall not, at any time hereafter, or under any pretence whatever, return unto the Kingdom of France or any the Dominions thereof."

Now Bar-le-Duc, the refuge afforded by the Duke of Lorraine for three years after the Treaty of Utrecht, was

no longer to be open to him. Deux Ponts, territory of the brilliant and erratic Charles XII of Sweden, offered but an uncertain refuge, even if it were possible to obtain a safe conduct thither.

His whole life, as he had said, had been a series of misfortunes, but in this hour his own misfortunes, dark as the future seemed, weighed with him but little compared with those of his faithful followers.

The decision to leave Scotland had indeed been like tearing the live heart from his body; yet no other alternative offered itself as an end to a venture almost hopeless from the start. To remain would only be to add to the blood that had been shed at Preston and Sheriffmuir, and that of Lords Kenmure and Derwentwater even now staining the scaffold on Tower Hill.

Amid the wreck of fortune two human consolations alone were left him—his mother and his friend—then, as he started Sancho down the hill towards the bridge over the Seine, a premonition came to him that Piero was in deadly peril. He checked his horse. Reason argued that François was with the Prince, that none knew of his presence in Paris, that, once outside the walls on his way to Madrid, none were likely to recognize him nor know on what mission he rode. None the less the feeling was so strong that the King wheeled, and had nearly reached the chestnut wood on the way back to Paris, when from the shadow of the trees came a rider on a grey horse. The king pulled onto the side of the road and drew his sword; then, as the grey came near, he gave an exclamation, for its rider was François.

When the King had heard the story of Piero's capture he gave a curt order.

"Straight back to Paris with me. Not a word. You dared to leave the Prince of Este in such peril and then to rejoin me?"

"His orders," muttered François. "I had to rejoin Your Majesty. Think you I would have left you but that I had to be with him to delude his captors into thinking him to be you?"

James struck the pommel of his saddle with his open hand.

"Fool that I was not to have seen that was why he changed cloaks and rings with me!"

François laid a hand on Sancho's bridle.

"Hist!" he whispered. "Riders round the next corner, coming up the hill."

They drew in under the shadow of a wall, and in a moment four riders came into sight, in dark livery, on strong mounts, the moon glinting on the polished handles of the pistols in their holsters and the hilts of their long, heavy swords. They talked carelessly.

"If you had seen the captain's face when he tore off the bandage and saw it was the wrong man, and the Frenchies' faces when they found they had lost the reward!"

"'Tis an ill wind, as the saying is," chuckled another: "Since now *we* are like to get it. He's rid from Abbeville in the last two days, and his horse must be done while ours are fresh. Once round this corner we can put on speed."

James pulled Sancho so suddenly across the road that the horse of the last speaker shied, threw him and bolted.

"Gentlemen," he said with a little laugh and bow: "let me save you further trouble and a longer ride. Here I am."

"By St. Andrew!" gasped the first. "'Tis the Pretender himself!"

"Out with your blade!" cried James sharply. "I'll kill no defenceless man."

A pistol exploded behind him, blowing away his hat.

He swung round in the saddle and before the man had time to draw another pistol the rapier was in his heart.

François had his work cut out for him with the fourth, and the King only escaped being pierced by the one he had bidden draw because the weight of the dead man dragged his rapier almost from his hand and pulled him down sideways in the saddle. Then his own danger and Piero's treacherous capture set his blood afire, and there surged up in him as at Malplaquet, the Celtic *mire chatha,* the fierce wild joy of battle. Gone were grief for the past, forebodings for the future; only remained that primitive and most enduring of all human instincts, the struggle for self-preservation, sublimated into something more burning and inspired than mere animal desire for life.

To and fro stamped and wheeled the horses; in the uncertain moonlight that flickered through the bare chestnut boughs the blades flashed and rang in feint and attack, lunge and riposte. A hoarse cry from François and a heavy fall turned the King's attention to his left, where the valet's opponent leant from his saddle to give him the *coup de grâce* as he lay almost under the horse's hoofs. Snatching the dagger from his saddle with his left hand, the King struck with full force at the man's shoulder, carrying him forward onto the neck of his horse, which swerved, unseated him and then kicked him in terror as he lay. But that instant had laid the King open to his opponent's blade, which ran up his, and on up his right arm from wrist to elbow. His rapier fell from his powerless hand; as he reeled in his saddle he saw the face coming at him—snarling lips drawn back from pointed teeth, blood-shot eyes—and knew death was on him.

He opened his eyes slowly to see bare boughs against a dim grey sky, then, conscious of exquisite pain in his

right arm, looked down to see François binding it tightly but deftly with strips torn from the sleeve of the lawn shirt. Seeing the King's eyes open, François slipped an arm under his head and held a flask to his lips. The king drank, then made a wry face.

"Claret! And you know how I hate that vinegar. Why not Burgundy? What happened? I expected to be dead."

"I saved Your Majesty," said François, preening himself and shaking out his crumpled and blood-stained ruffles. "As that devil was about to put his blade through Your Majesty's heart, I seized him by the leg and pulled him from his horse."

James laughed.

"And then?"

"It appeared that the best thing to do was to put him out of action, so I planted my dagger in his black gizzard."

James sat up and looked round. Sancho was peacefully cropping the grass by the roadside. François' grey was tethered to a branch beside the bay of the King's opponent, who lay crumpled in a heap with a little stream of blood still trickling from the corner of his mouth. The one who had been thrown lay on his side, breathing stertorously; the other, who had shot at the King, was on his back in a pool of blood, arms outstretched; the last, whom the King had stabbed to save François, had his face kicked out of human likeness by his terrified horse.

James looked quickly away from him and held out his left hand to François, who helped him to his feet.

"We gave a good account of ourselves, especially you, François. And now for Paris and the Prince."

He swayed and would have fallen but for François' supporting arm.

"You must find shelter here, Sire. You cannot ride to Paris."

The King's eyes opened, huge and black in the whiteness of his face.

"Another drink of that filthy vinegar you call claret and we start. Can or cannot, I ride to Paris. If the Prince is still a prisoner, they shall exchange him for the King, if that is the only way."

"Sire," began François, "I beg of you to remember that everything hangs on your safety. With you lost or captured, all is lost. By giving yourself up you will make the Prince's sacrifice useless. Everyone, everything, must, if necessary, be sacrificed to you."

The King silenced him with a gesture.

The little chill breeze which rises before dawn stirred the chestnut boughs so that they creaked and rustled, but through that sound another grew louder and louder—the hoofs of a galloping horse coming along the road from Paris.

As the rider came round the corner he found himself confronted by three horses and two masked men while the rays of the setting moon glinted on the barrels of two pistols.

"I've no money, save half a dozen louis," he called. "You shall have them if you will let me through on a matter of urgency."

"From whom to whom?"

"From the Prince d'Auvergne. If you let me pass to St. Germains the money is yours and no more said. If not, the Place de la Grève or the Bastille for both of you."

"To whom is your message at St. Germains?" asked James, inadvertently moving so that the moonlight fell on his bare head and scarlet coat.

"St. Denis! 'Tis for Your Majesty I carry a letter. I know you, for I saw you go into the *Nid au Bois* as I waited with the Prince's horse last night."

He took a small packet sealed with the d'Auvergne

arms from the breast of his coat and handed it to the King.

"From the Prince of Este," he said, "with a message that, by the time Your Majesty received this, he would be safe out of Paris on the way to you knew where."

James broke the seals and opened a sheet with a few lines scrawled in Piero's familiar and almost illegible writing:

> "*Cuore mio,* my luck still holds, and this time I've escaped the devil and Stair, so all's well if you are. D'Auvergne will tell you all; he has fed, clothed and started me on the road south. Be very careful of yourself; with you lost, all were lost.—P."

"I went to Chaillot first," said the messenger, "hearing the Queen was there, and that delayed me."

"The Queen at the convent? Then I might have saved myself and Sancho these sixteen miles, and four good servants of John, Earl of Stair might still be living in joyful anticipation of the reward for my worthless person. François, to saddle, and back to Chaillot!"

2

James dismounted stiffly and knocked at the convent door while François led away the horses. The chapel bell was ringing; from the old quince tree in the walled garden the first clear notes of a blackbird pierced the silver air of the cool, rain-washed dawn. The little shutter in the oak door rattled back, and through the grill peered the wrinkled, apple-cheeked face of Sister Mary Berchmans, one of James's childhood friends.

"Holy Virgin!" she cried, struggling with bolts and bars. "It is my little King himself!"

She clasped his hands and drew him inside, exclaiming

with horror at sight of his torn sleeve, bandaged arm, drenched coat and mud-caked boots.

"The Queen has just gone in to Mass, but I will run and fetch her."

"But no, little sister," smiled James, laying a detaining hand on her black sleeve. "Do not disturb her. I will go in and hear Mass too and then——"

"Then you will breakfast, and Sœur Angélique will attend to your arm. I will see about the food. No doubt you are starved as well as wet through. You need a woman to look after you."

She ran off, clucking like an old hen over a too adventurous chicken and James slipped unobserved into a shadowed corner of the chapel. Beyond the grille he could see the rows of nuns in their black veils and habits as they chanted the Psalms of Tierce. In the serene, passionless beauty of their voices was something of that clear, aloof purity which had rung in the crystal notes of the awakening bird, and filled the translucent air of the spring dawn with a virginal beauty almost unearthly.

Then his eyes sought and found his mother, the being he loved more than any on earth, except Piero—she who had never failed him in childhood, boyhood or youth. She knelt with bowed head, her long black draperies sweeping about her, the pale beauty of her profile clear against the folds of her black lace veil. Her eyes were closed; her lips moved soundlessly as the worn beads of her Rosary slipped through her slender fingers.

James knew that but for his sake she would now have realized her life-long desire, and have been one of the nuns chanting those comforting words: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall care for thee; He will not deliver the just for ever to the tempest."

He thought of his father, and the happiest of his later days spent in the monastery of La Trappe, the close friend-

ship with Abbé de Rancé, the austerity shared with the monks, the frugal fare of pulse and water, the long hours of silence broken only by the bell calling to office and the solemn greeting: *"Mourir frères, mourir il faut!"*

He was conscious of the desire deep within his own heart and seldom acknowledged even to himself to turn his back on a world which offered nothing but vain hopes and disillusions, and free from the distractions of politics and plots, jealousies and treachery, to be able to devote himself body, mind and heart, to that *Opus Dei* beside which all else seemed to him "as a little sand."

Sister Berchmans provided a breakfast for the King and his mother to which he, at any rate, did ample justice. Shaved, washed and dressed in another coat, which François had apparently conjured out of the void, James felt a boy again as he watched the glad light in the Queen's face, and after an omelette whose golden creaminess melted in the mouth, little rolls hot from the oven, honey from the convent garden, and great steaming bowls of coffee, he declared himself a new creature.

His mother touched his wounded arm lightly, and he kissed her hand.

"Have no fear, *ma mère*. Sœur Angélique washed and bandaged it with such firmness and efficiency that I do not envy the sick sisters under her care. It is a clean cut and will heal in a few days. Quicker than the one I got at Malplaquet."

She took his right hand between hers, stroking the scar he would carry to his grave as a memento of the German sabre-cut which had disabled his sword-hand in the famous charge.

"My son," she said gently, "you should be more careful of yourself. You are all I have left. More, on you depends the whole hope of your race, all the rights of the English and Scottish crowns. But more still, far

more, you and you alone are, humanly speaking, the only hope of English Catholicism; with you at St. James's England would, nay, shall, be once more in communion with the See of Peter."

James's eyes darkened and his finely pencilled brows met in a frown as he rose and flung out both hands.

"Am I never to be a man?" he cried impatiently; "only a Cause? Always symbol and never free to be myself? 'That Person who did take upon himself the title of Prince of Wales and King of Great Britain!' *Mon dieu!* If they only knew how thankful I should be to be rid of these empty titles! What am I but a king of shadows? Far happier were I but a plain man, free to come and go as I would, to enjoy beauty and friendship, hunting, fighting, dancing, the ring of blade on blade, quick mind against quick mind."

"Have you not forgotten the greatest of all human things?" she asked. "Love—the love of man for woman, of man and woman for the children that are his and hers?"

Instead of answering James took her by the hands and drew her to her feet.

"Let us go into the garden, for the sun is shining, and I have not seen it since I left France last year."

She sat down on a stone seat under a shelter which faced south down the length of the enclosed garden. The blackbird—the Jacobite secret symbol for James himself—had deserted the quince and was engaged in a fierce tug-of-war with a fat worm which refused to be dislodged from the wet black earth. In the shade raindrops still sparkled on bare twigs and smooth turf; in the sunshine the crocuses were beginning to open on each side of the straight, stone-flagged path, with clumps of snowdrops breaking the long lines of yellow and purple. Overhead the sky had that clear pale beauty which only comes after

the long rains and snows of winter; when, with the first stirring of spring: "the time of the singing of birds is come."

But Mary of Modena saw none of these things. Her eyes and heart were engrossed with her tall son as he leant against the rough pillar of the garden house, the sun catching copper gleams in his short hair, caressing the smooth olive skin of the long oval face, and lightening the black-lashed eyes to red-gold. Then she saw him no longer as a man, strong and supple as steel for all his tall, slender grace, but as the crying, downy-headed, new-born babe she had held to her breast in that crowded room in St. James's nearly twenty-eight years before. She saw him as the grave little boy of seven smiling shyly at Dundee's exiled and penniless officers, giving them his purse and saying with the irresistible fascination of his race, and a quaint dignity all his own: "I am only a child and cannot yet understand much of these things, but I do understand enough to know your loyalty to my Father, and I am resolved never to forget it." She saw him and his little sister Louise, *la consolatrice,* as her father called her, pacing hand-in-hand along the terrace of St. Germains, while her sad husband leant heavily on her arm and paused to look down on the winding, wooded Seine to remind her, with tears in his worn blue eyes, how much it resembled his favourite view of the Thames from Richmond Terrace. She spoke so abruptly that James turned with a start.

"You know it was my dream as a girl to enter the Visitation Convent that adjoined the palace at Modena? How I cried and cried when Lord Peterborough came to ask me in marriage for your father. How I clung to my dream till the Holy Father himself wrote that my vocation was to the court, not the cloister, to bear chil-

dren to the Catholic heir to the English king, that once more Catholic kings should sit on the English throne and bring that poor country back to the true Faith."

"And you were miserable at first."

"Your uncle, King Charles II, was my only friend. Remember, I was a child of fourteen; your father was forty—stern, silent, reserved."

James nodded.

"As I remember him. You know, *ma mère,* I feared him always, as I have loved you always."

"You were wrong to fear him. In his later days he was a saint."

She opened her worn Missal and drew out a scrap of paper, with a few words so tear-stained as to be almost illegible, which she handed to her son.

"Si quelqu'un veut venir après moy, qu'il renonce a soy mesme, qu'il porte sa croix et qu'il me suive."

"That was among his papers," she said softly. "It was his motto. I have striven to make it mine. And you——"

She stretched out her hand and drew her son down beside her.

"My beloved, you belong not to yourself, nor even to me, but to God and the Cause. Not for nothing have they named me the 'Queen of Tears.' Yet through all my misfortunes I have tried to say: 'Be it done unto me according to Thy Word.' But how much harder it is to endure the sufferings of those one loves than one's own pain, and to endure the suffering of a precious child, surely that is the hardest trial in the world."

She broke the silence, smiling a little.

"A foolish thought came to me when I was saying my Rosary this morning, before I knew you had come. The Resurrection, the Ascension—glorious mysteries indeed; but must Mary not have grieved when her Son's Body was laid in the tomb that, though she should see his glori-

ous, risen Self again on earth and for ever in heaven, yet never, never again could she touch and feel, see and hear that body of human flesh which she had borne beneath her heart and nursed at her breast?"

There was a clatter of wooden pattens on the stones, and Sister Berchmans came into sight.

"François is there with the horses, waiting for the King, Madame," she said; then she drew from the pocket of her voluminous skirt a little box, which she handed to James. "From Sœur Angélique, and you are to be careful to remember to anoint the wound night and morning, then no ill will befall. I have a stirrup-cup of Burgundy ready for you."

James kissed his mother's hand ceremoniously and followed the nun to the garden-gate, then he paused.

"Go in, *ma sœur,* I will follow in a moment."

He strode back between the gay yellow and purple crocuses. His mother sat as he had left her, her head bowed, her hands folded over her beads. He flung himself on his knees, with his arms about her, his face hidden in her lap. He felt tears falling on his neck; then she put her hands about his head and drew it to her breast, holding it there tightly so that he could feel under his cheek the irregular flutter of her heart, the quick sobbing intake of her breath. He lifted his head, and through his own tears looked long and intently on the pale beautiful face which a sure instinct told him he should not see again on earth. Then he pressed her hands almost fiercely to his quivering lips and was gone.

CHAPTER III

THE BOARD IS SET

As the great coach lumbered southward through the bare plain of northern France, Margaret pressed her face against the rain-blurred window, watching eagerly for the first sight of Paris. Lady Mary Gordon, her father's aunt, smiled at her.

"The sea voyage from Edinburgh to Boulogne whipped back a few roses to your cheeks, Meg," she said. "You were a poor, pale, peaky lass when I found you at Dundee."

Margaret turned and slipped a hand through the old lady's arm.

"You came just like a fairy godmother and whisked me away when everything was black and dour."

"Paris should complete the cure, for any lass who's not consoled by a dozen beaux for the loss of one lover is but a fool."

Margaret's cheeks grew not rosy, but scarlet.

"What mean you, Aunt Mary? You know I have never loved any in that way."

"Hoots! when a lassie grows thin and pale without bodily ailment, no need to seek further than the one reason."

Margaret met the keen gaze squarely.

"I have never loved any man like that. My heart, my loyalty, my dreams have been all for the King."

"Have a care then," returned the old lady drily. "Loyalty to a Stuart is near akin to love, and love for a

Stuart brings at best misfortune, at worst dishonour. There's the walls of Paris and the Porte St. Denis. We'll be safe in the De Sarci Hotel before dark, and I vow I'll not be sorry to sleep in a decent bed again."

Lady Mary was an old and experienced traveller. Her husband had inherited from a French uncle a property in Provence, which he had visited periodically with his wife, and now, as during his lifetime, she had arranged to rent part of their large hotel from her cousins by marriage, Jules and Clarice de Sarci. Lady Mary and her husband had lived in the old house at Glenisla since Master Forbes had left it to study law in Edinburgh. She still spent most of her time there, with an occasional visit to Edinburgh or London and a rarer one to the chateau near Vaucluse. Her only son had been killed at Oudenarde the year after his father's death, but the staunch old Whig and Hanoverian, refusing to be broken by this last tragedy, kept her head as erect, her eyes and tongue as keen, and her mind as alert as ever. Stopping with Jock Forbes on her way to Edinburgh in March to discuss some details of the Glenisla property, Lady Mary had noticed Margaret's pallor and silence, noticed, too, that the relations between the girl and her uncle had lost their pleasant intimacy, so then and there she had announced her intention of carrying off Margaret as a companion during her French tour.

Under her competent direction the voyage across the North Sea and the journey through the plains of Picardy were accomplished as comfortably as was possible. Her elderly maid, Jean, and her man, Ian, had accompanied her and her husband abroad so often that they both knew France almost as well as Scotland, so it was with a feeling of homelike comfort that Margaret settled down in the great four-poster hung with faded embroidered curtains which Jean insisted on drawing tightly before

blowing out the candles and departing to her own bed.

The next day dawned brilliantly and after greeting the old lady in bed, Margaret ran down to the garden in a morning sacque of cream, splashed with large crimson roses and green leaves, turned back over a petticoat of quilted green satin. Within its high stone walls the garden was like a magic enclosure. Rows of tall red and yellow tulips bordered the straight paths, standing stiff and erect as soldiers on parade, their feet hidden by a foam of blue forget-me-nots. The formal fashion set by Lenôtre in the gardens of Versailles had mercifully passed by this fairy place and left it unspoilt. Clumps of white and purple and bronze heartsease lifted eager, innocent faces to the sunshine; masses of yellow and rust-coloured gillieflowers filled the warm air with a sweetness stronger than the faint perfume of the opening buds of white and mauve lilac.

Margaret sat down on a rustic seat; the sun caressed her smooth cheeks and throat, her dark hair and red mouth, lapped her in a sense of physical well-being so strong that other feelings were submerged.

Drowsily she told herself that the past was dead and buried, the future hers to mould and re-make as she would, without room for remorse and regret. Then, under her closed lids rose suddenly a picture of the King as he had taken her rose from his breast and flung it into the fire, of Piero as he had looked back at her with awful contempt and hatred. She pulled from her breast and opened a little gold locket which hung about her neck on a fine gold chain. Inside was a fragment of lace and silk half-charred. Yet not altogether consumed, and should not old hopes and dreams spring phœnix-like from the ashes? She knew she had been a fool and worse—ill-balanced, uncontrolled, self-centred—visiting her own disillusions

and disappointments upon the idol who had shown himself to be a man—a man on whose head, in his hour of failure and despair, she had poured the vial of her own petty, ignorant anger. The tears filled her eyes, but she blinked them away. Of what avail to weep what could not be undone? Repentance, if needs be confession and amendment, and a determination to do all in her power to atone for her own cruel folly—this must lie in the future.

She slipped back the locket and lay back to dream idly in the sun, but she felt no longer that remote stillness of silent enchantment. In the hot sunshine and scented air, the blaze of red, blue, white, yellow and purple flowers, in the very earth itself dark, damp, stirring at last from its long winter sleep of frost and rain and snow, in all these it seemed that life pulsed with a fluttering breath and beating heart, calling with a music far-off yet within her very breast.

She heard a light quick step on the path and saw before her the Marquis de Sarci, whom she remembered that night at Gorntully. He was an incongruous figure in the spring garden as he bowed over her hand. The haggardness of his face was accentuated rather than relieved by its heavy coat of paint and rouge. His thin figure was clad in a coat of dove-coloured silk embroidered with silver, cut in the most ultra-extreme mode of the moment, its full skirts stiffened with whalebone. The fabulously high red heels of his diamond-buckled shoes and the height of his elaborately curled and perfumed wig failed to bring him much above Margaret's shoulder as she rose from her curtsey.

"Your most devoted slave, Mademoiselle. If I had known that Fate was to smile on me in allowing my eyes to feast so soon again on your beauty I should have been spared my one regret in leaving Scotland."

"Lady Mary carried me off unexpectedly."

"And this is your first visit to Paris?"

"Am I then so countrified in dress and manner?"

"It would be impossible for you to be in Paris and the world not know it. There are some stars so dazzling that beside their radiance all others grow dim. Life without you now, Mademoiselle, would be as night without a moon."

"Console yourself, Monsieur le Marquis," she laughed. "I think my aunt means to spend some weeks in Paris."

"Most divine nymph," he exclaimed, sinking onto the seat beside her, hand to heart, "I breathe again. My heart still beats, though faintly!"

"Will you do me a service in return?"

"I could refuse you nothing."

"Tell me the news."

The gaze of the huge dark eyes grew intent and penetrating.

"Of whom?"

"The King, of course," she answered impatiently.

"Mademoiselle, curiosity lost Eden. Not that I personally should have found that Paradise very exciting."

He shrugged his thin shoulders, took out an enamelled snuff-box and tapped it languidly.

"Do you not trust me then?" she asked. "True, Aunt Mary is a Whig, but do you not remember me at the King's reception at Gorntully?"

"Many were there who afterwards betrayed him. To-day, 'Hosanna!' To-morrow, 'Crucify!'"

She looked at him startled. His eyes blazed with passion, then he made a little gesture as if to sweep away emotion.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle! I do not doubt you. I know of your ride alone from Dundee to Perth to save the King and of his regret that you were gone before he could thank you in person."

Margaret flushed and spoke as if the words were forced from her.

"He did come to thank me the very night he sailed from Scotland. You spoke the truth, the bitter truth, Monsieur: 'To-day, "Hosanna!" To-morrow, "Crucify!"'"

She hid her face in her hands. He laid a hand lightly on her arm and spoke gently, artifice and pretence laid aside.

"But you did not betray him. No, that were impossible. Tell me, if you will, and perhaps we may find a way to right a wrong."

She told him the bare facts in quick, broken sentences elaborating nothing, extenuating nothing.

When she had finished he took a pinch of snuff before he spoke.

"It was natural, quite natural. It is the tendency of human nature to burn what it has adored, to shatter its idol because the idol is not of pure gold as it had fancied. Mademoiselle, you are young."

"No younger than yourself, surely."

"I was born old, so may die young. Mademoiselle, you have done wrong. You have confessed your sin and are sorry for it. Do you wish to make amends?"

"In any way within my power. Only tell me how I may do it. Let me serve the King anyhow, anywhere, anywhen, without hope of gratitude or reward."

"You may be useful. Lady Mary Gordon, as a well-known Whig, will not be suspect. You will have the entrée to the British embassy. Indeed Lord Stair is a kinsman of hers."

"And the King, is he in Paris?"

"I forgot you arrived only last night. France is no longer open to him, and he has been refused his old refuge at Bar-le-Duc by the Duke of Lorraine. Nothing for it but Avignon, where he arrived on the second

of April with the Duke of Mar, and was joined by the Duke of Ormonde and others of his Scotch followers who escaped in the five ships he despatched for them."

"We heard of Lord Nithsdale's escape and the executions of Kenmure and Derwentwater, but what of Lord Marischal and his brother?"

"The King insisted on delaying the Marie Thérèse several hours for them, but through some mistake they did not appear. The Prince of Este, of course, embarked with the King, popular as ever. *Mon dieu!* How the captain swore at having to take that precious bay mare as well as the King's black."

"Is the Prince not liked?"

"None could be popular who is as inseparable from the King, and has so much influence over him."

Margaret felt a little chill foreboding. She never doubted the King's generosity and forgiveness, but she felt that the Prince was one who would neither forget nor forgive such an injury done to his friend. The Marquis flicked an imaginary grain of snuff from his cravat before he continued with a sneer:

"*Monsieur le Prince* is quite the perfect pagan. He fights, he intrigues, he loves, he hates with altogether too flawless a self-assurance.

"You evidently do not like him."

"Shall I tell you why Jules does not like him?" said a laughing voice, and Clarice de Sarci, who had come noiselessly across the grass behind them, leant over her brother with a hand on each shoulder: "Because they both love power, and the Prince is one of the few whom Jules cannot make dance like a puppet on his string."

He took her hands and kissed them lightly.

"*Touché, chérie!* But is it kind of you to reveal my darkest secrets to Mademoiselle whom I adore?"

"Do not believe a quarter of what Jules says, Made-

moiselle; he is not half so black as he likes to paint himself."

"Diable!" he answered with a grimace; "I am ugly enough as it is, but did I not paint I should appear too execrable for civilised society. Is not that a much stronger reason for my dislike to *Monsieur le Prince?* He has all I lack—physical strength, grace, beauty, health, youth. Jealousy, Mademoiselle, is not only a feminine failing. One must laugh at humanity and oneself. Now I must tear myself away for I have an appointment with that so charming Abbé Dubois. *Chérie,* invite Milady and Mademoiselle this evening; I should like them to hear my new Florentine piano."

He kissed his sister's hands, and as their eyes met once again Margaret knew herself as a beggar, shut out from the warmth and happiness of that *égoisme à deux* which is the nearest approach to an earthly paradise. Then, as she turned to answer some remark, her regrets were swept away in warm and enthusiastic admiration. Clarice de Sarci was smaller even than her brother, but of such perfect proportions that it would have seemed a desecration to add one inch to her height. Her hair was fine as gossamer and lustrous as fairy gold; the faint colour of her cheeks was delicate as the gleam of a rose through the iridescence of milky glass. She looked fragile, ethereal and unreal as some shepherdess in a Watteau pastoral, but in her deep blue eyes shone a soul generous, brave and wholly selfless.

Lady Mary and her great-niece supped in a corner of the large *salle de reception* on the first floor before descending to visit the de Sarcis on the *rez de chaussée.*

"What do you think of Jules?" asked the old lady, bluntly.

"He is unlike anyone I ever met."

"Naturally; we do not breed that type in Scotland. A miserable, weak body driven to death by an indomitable will, like William of Orange. But don't let that prejudice you against him, little Jacobite."

"I love his sister."

"Then you must like him. They have scarcely been separated since they were born."

"She told me they were twins, and that she did not remember her father."

"The old Marquis was fifty-six when he married a girl of sixteen—as lovely as Clarice, but the most absolute little egoist, incapable of a thought but for her own advantage."

"Did she marry for money, then?"

"Money, title and position, for she was only of the *haute bourgeoisie*. John and I stayed here on our way to Vaucluse two years after their marriage. The Marquis was desolated that there were no signs of an heir; she lived only for admiration and amusement. Then, one day, she discovered there was to be a child. I shall never forget the scene—her tears, her screams, her almost insane rage and fear."

"That is why they are so delicate?"

"It was little short of a miracle that they were born at all," snorted Lady Mary, shaking out the folds of her purple silk dress. "She ran to every quack doctor, took every known drug. They brought the news to the sick-bed of the old Marquis of the birth of a son and a daughter. *'Malgré tout?'* he said. *'Et deux enfants? Présentez à Madame la Marquise mes condoléances les plus sincères!'* Then he smiled that cynical little smile of his, turned his face to the wall and died. But I grow garrulous in my old age; we shall be late. Walk across the room, child."

Margaret obeyed, wondering.

"To-morrow we spend a busy day—coiffeurs, costu-

miers, chausseurs, modistes of all sorts. You are beautiful, my dear, and know how to move, but your clothes are marked 'Dundee' from shoulder to hem."

The room downstairs where Clarice and Jules received them was a contrast to the rest of the dignified, dark old house. It had been done up in the latest fashion—the *décor* was of a daintiness, a gold and white, blue and rose artificiality which was a perfect background for Clarice's fragile loveliness, and made Margaret realize poignantly the provincialism of her own appearance. Jules was resplendent in a coat of blue velvet the shade of a pale sapphire, its long narrow revers covered with silver lace, innumerable rows of silver straps and buttons on sleeves and full skirts. Huge bows of rose-coloured silk ribbon at shoulder and elbow matched the waistcoat, whose colour was almost hidden by a pattern of rose and white paste. The buttons of the waistcoat were of pink diamonds, as were the buckles of the red-heeled shoes, whose red-edged flaps were cut so high in front as to conceal the boniness of the silk-clad ankles. The high curled wig was lightly powdered, while a large diamond-shaped velvet patch on the right cheekbone accentuated the size and depth of the enormous eyes, which were the one beauty of the haggard face.

Margaret felt a sudden awkwardness. Some unaccountable impulse had made her bare her inmost thoughts to this man whom she had met but a few moments before, while an impulse, equally foreign to her hitherto reserved nature, had told her that in Clarice she might find such a friend as she had never yet known. But she need not have been afraid. Jules, after greeting Lady Mary, turned to Margaret with the most stilted and artificial compliments of the mode, as if they met for the first time. He became natural only when displaying his new toy, the piano, which had just arrived from Florence and

explaining to Lady Mary the mechanism by which hammers struck the strings when the notes were pressed, instead of the strings being plucked by hand as in the old-fashioned virginals and harpsichords. He met her objections to "new-fangled machines" by sitting down and beginning the accompaniment to a chanson of Boileau Despréaux, which he then sang, with a psuedo-amorous glance at Margaret.

"Voici les lieux charmants où mon âme ravie
Passait à contempler Sylvie. . . ."

Then the light tenor voice took on a little mocking tone:

"Mon coeur, vous soupirez au nom de l'infidèle,
Avez vous oublié que vous ne l'aimez plus?"

He swung round on his seat as he finished.

"Mademoiselle, come and convince Milady that my new-fangled machine is something more than mere artifice. Sing one of those Scotch songs that bring tears to the eyes of exiles—that one you sang at Gorntully."

He began the accompaniment to the Ogilvie Lament, with a feeling and a pathos which proved him all artist —and for a moment Margaret stood silent, while memory caught her back to that barbaric hall, which had thrilled to the notes or Piero's Stradivarius. Then she sang:

"Now a' is done that men can do,
And a' is done in vain . . .
The sodger frae the wars returns,
The sailor from the main,
But I hae pairted frae my love,
Never to meet again, my dear,
Never to meet again."

Once Jules' great eyes, dark with emotion, met Margaret's, then, as she sang the last line, she was conscious of his rigidity, and instead of a compliment he ended with a crashing discord and rose abruptly.

"Very charming indeed, a very adequate rendering of a very misdirected sentiment."

Margaret turned with a start, as did Lady Mary and Clarice; Jules alone had been instinctively aware of the entrance of a visitor before the words were spoken. In the door stood a tall man, plainly but richly dressed in velvet of so dark a blue as to appear almost black, with narrow lines of scarlet on waistcoat and cuffs of the coat. On his breast was the Order of the Thistle, and on a green ribbon over his lace cravat the golden Cross of St. Andrew. He bowed and addressed Clarice in French.

"It is permitted, Mademoiselle, that I enter? I come to pay my respects to Lady Mary Gordon, and Jean told me I should find her here."

Clarice curtseyed in silence and as the stranger advanced to Lady Mary, Margaret saw that Jules had vanished.

"'Tis gey guid of ye, Cousin Jock," said the old lady, with the Scots accent she affected on occasions, "to come and see an auld wife so soon. Meg, come and be presented to his most serene and potent Britannic Majesty's ambassador in Paris, John, second Earl of Stair, Knight of the Thistle, St. Andrew and the laird kens how many more. Jock, this is Margaret Ogilvie, grand-daughter of my dearest sister, Meg, but mebbe ye'll nae mind her, gin ye were but a wee bairn when she dee'd."

Margaret's eyes met Stair's, so deep-set under heavy brows that she could not see their colour. She only knew that they burned with a strange cold fire and pierced like steel as if they would lay bare the inmost feelings and thoughts. Then he spoke again, and she noticed that his

low voice had a vibrance of tone that was at once beautiful and repellent.

"I commend the Pretender's taste," said the ambassador. "I vow 'tis the first time we have thought alike."

"What's your riddle?" asked Lady Mary.

Lord Stair took out his snuff-box and looked round the room with lifted brows.

"Since your host and hostess have both vanished, it appears that my welcome here is not too warm. May I take you to your own rooms?"

As she followed them up the stairs Margaret's first instinct was to take refuge in flight; then she remembered de Sarci's words: "You may be useful. You will have the entrée to the embassy," and she went into the salon and sat down by her aunt. As Lord Stair and the old lady talked Margaret was conscious of his gaze, which travelled down her, from piled dark hair and flushed cheeks, over white throat, arms and bosom, to the slender feet which peeped from under the crimson damask skirt. He flicked some snuff from his lace ruffle with long taper fingers, which turned back at the tips almost at a right angle, and asked abruptly:

"You are taking the child out, of course, Cousin Mary?"

"We are busy to-morrow getting clothes for her."

"An absorbing occupation, but do not dally too long over your choice, for the night after there is a grand masked ball at the Palais Royal. The Duke of Orleans has sent me an invitation, but unfortunately I am expecting to be otherwise engaged that evening, so I hope you will go instead of me."

Margaret lay awake long after Jean had put out the lights, feeling keenly excited at the prospect of the Palais Royal ball, and yet, behind her pleasure, like a snake curled under a scented bloom, was the half-formed thought

that beneath the apparent kindness of the invitation lay some sinister design, some devilish plot. She seemed to see in the darkness those strange eyes, cold yet burning, to hear again that fascinating yet repellent voice: "I commend the Pretender's taste."

What did Lord Stair know, and how? What *was* there tc know? She fell asleep still wondering.

CHAPTER IV

THE CELLAR IN THE RUE D'AUVERGNE

The King pushed aside some of the papers, and François put down the tray on a corner of the table. The King put back the thick hair from his forehead wearily and looked out of the long window into the garden which was basking in the spring sunshine, while Minette, who had been asleep at his feet, sat up and laid a paw on his knee. On the wide hearth smouldered a mass of charred papers, and François raised his eyebrows as he glanced at the piles still on the table, some neatly tied together, others in untidy heaps.

"You must eat now, Sire," he said. "You have worked long enough. See! Two young partridges, ready to melt in the mouth, white bread still hot from baking, the first lettuces which I got with these grapes in the Paris market this morning, and a special bottle of your favourite Burgundy."

"You got to Paris and back all right then? Sit down and tell me the news while I dine."

"News? *Parbleu!* At the *Nid au Bois* there is altogether too much! Too much talk, too many women. Sire, they waste time. They wanted all the Avignon news, and I laughed to myself to think how little they guessed that all the while you were at St. Germains. As I passed there was a coach waiting outside the English Embassy, and who do you think came from the Embassy and got into it?"

"No friend of ours, anyhow. Congratulations on

the partridges, *mon ami!* Minette, here are the bones for thee."

"But very much a friend, Your Majesty, the demoiselle who rode that night to Perth dressed like a man, and whom Père de St. Etienne handed to my care."

James poured out a glass of Burgundy and looked through it at the light before he answered carelessly.

"What should a friend of ours be doing at Lord Stair's?"

"An old lady was waiting for her in the coach. When Mademoiselle got in they drove away. I found out at Mademoiselle de Chausseraye's that the old one was a Miladi Marie—I forget the rest—a great-aunt of Mademoiselle, and that they go to the *bal masqué* at the Palais Royal to-morrow night, Mademoiselle as Proserpine."

"You seemed to have learnt a great deal, François," said the King drily; "but nothing useful. Did you deliver my letter?"

"Yes, Sire. You will go out when you have finished? It is beautiful in the sunshine. In here it is dark and cold and sad, altogether empty and lonely."

He went out, and James sat staring before him, his meal unfinished. Empty? No, the palace was crowded with ghosts, ghosts of his dead father and sister, his own childhood and boyhood, his hopes and dreams. He took from a pile of papers one written by the father whom he had feared rather than loved, but whose severity, as he saw now, had been only an excess of anxiety that his son should avoid the sins and failings of his own youth and manhood.

"I abhor and detest myself for having lived so many years in an almost perpetual course of sin, not only in my youth, when I was carried away with the heat of it and ill example, but even after I was come to years of more discretion." So the exiled King had written and then

that outpouring of gratitude to: "so gracious and merciful a God . . . to have covered my head so often in the day of battle, delivered me so many times from the dangers of the sea and the noise of its waves."

And now he had entered into the heaven where if indeed, "there shall be no more sea," it seemed impossible that this sea-loving, island-bred English sailor should not be home-sick for the ships and waves so dear to his heart. *"Preserve the mastery of the sea,"* he had written emphatically in the memorial of advice left to his son—that naval supremacy for which he had fought so bravely and fiercely, had worked for so long and arduously in the Admiralty, arranging every detail of organization from fleets and armaments to seamen's pay, rations, and treatment when sick or infirm.

James now recognized in himself so many personal traits peculiar to his father, and apart from the Stuart heritage of immortal fascination and ill-omened doom—his thoroughness in work, his fastidiousness in style, his unswerving honesty and integrity, his unfaltering devotion to his religion, a devotion which had lost his father three kingdoms, which he himself had refused to regain by the sacrifice of his Faith and conscience. There were things in his life which he would have changed, but his own firm and definite refusal to be acknowledged as her successor by his half-sister Anne at the price of a temporary outward conformance to the Church of England was a decision he had never for an instant regretted.

He recognized, too, in himself that reserve which in his father, had never been completely broken through even by his beloved and devoted Queen, and he fancied that, like his father, he was doomed to move through life in a loneliness that none could entirely abate, even his most intimate and beloved friend, Piero

d'Este. He knew in himself a detachment from overwhelming human love and passion and an aloofness of soul which are sometimes the reason for failure in the things of this world, but the means for a more absolute absorption in God and the things of eternity.

James pulled the last packets of papers towards him, quickly and neatly separated them, tied up those to be preserved, and took the rest to the half-dead fire. He stirred it and watched the flames flicker along the edges of the papers, the blackness of the ink changed to ghostly white as the charred fragments of papers consumed—notes and letters of his dead father, his dead sister, the mother whom he knew he should never see again. In the dying flames and blown ashes he saw a vision of his mother dead, dressed in the black habit of a Visitation nun—the habit which it had been her dearest wish to wear from earliest childhood, through all the years of Queenhood, motherhood, and widowhood, but which would never clothe her in life.

He started as François came in, and with a reproachful look took away the unfinished meal; then, as he stepped out of the window into the garden, Minette cast an appealing look at him.

"*Bien,* Minette," he smiled. "Half an hour's walk then before I start for Paris."

He turned back, put on wig, hat and sword, and strode off along the terrace, where he and Louise had so often walked as children, with the tall aristocratic greyhound—Minette's grandfather—and the adoring mongrel fox-terrier which Largillière had painted with them.

Below him the Seine wound between its wooded banks; here sapphire, there silver, as shade or sun lay on the water. Eastward, beyond Marly-le-roi, the last plaything of *le roi soleil,* the red roofs of Paris were veiled by

a faint blue haze—Paris, for him the forbidden city, where in a few hours he meant to play another hazardous hand with fate.

Secretly, and alone but for François, he had left Avignon unknown either to the "nymphs" at the *Nid au Bois* or to the exiled Jacobites who filled the Papal city. To see the Duke of Orleans in person, to make a desperate appeal to him to withdraw from the proposed treaty with England and to continue the traditional French support of the Jacobite Cause—if this could be done, James believed that a descent on England would succeed where the rising in Scotland, hopelessly mismanaged and ill-timed, had so lamentably failed. If Piero had only returned with good news from Spain and promises of help from Cardinal Alberoni and Philip V, how much heavier the odds in his favour, but of Piero, long overdue, there was no news either at Avignon or Paris.

The greyhound's head was thrust into his hand, and in obedience to the hint James turned from the terrace into the forest where, in a moment, Minette had forgotten her lofty calm and was chasing imaginary hares. The King left the wide grass-ride and pushed his way through the undergrowth to a small glade which had been a favourite playground of his sister and himself. He threw himself down against the smooth trunk of a beech-tree, whose young leaves gleamed like green fire in the sunshine. Here and there clumps of primroses still made golden patches among the purplish leaves of the wood anemones. The petals of the wild cherry blossom fluttered like snowflakes through the still air, and as far as eye could see was a sheet of wild hyacinths, blue as Italian skies, sweet as honey. As James lay there nature lapped him about with her peace and warmth. Kingship, troubles, difficulties, plots and plans, diplomacy, finance, jealous followers, treacherous friends, regrets and fears

were blotted out and passed like drifting clouds before the shining of the sun. Peace enveloped him—a peace of mind and body warm and sweet and wholly satisfying.

Through his drooping lashes the blue stretches of bluebells grew cool as shadows on sunlit snow. He was standing in the snow, under the pale winter sky of the north; Margaret Ogilvie knelt at his feet. He took her hands in his, raised her, and looked into her eyes—black-lashed eyes clear and aloof as a mountain tarn, yet dark with unfathomable depths. In them he saw a face reflected—proud, young, beautiful, his own face, or was it Piero's, his *alter ego?*

He was awakened by a wet tongue on his hand, and took the greyhound's slim head between his hands with a little laugh.

"Wise Minette, to wake me from such a foolish dream. Thou at least wilt never change nor spurn me. But what if I succeed where once, nay twice, I failed? Nay 'twas not *I* that failed. God knows this enterprise was hopeless from the start."

He sat silent, staring before him, but no longer seeing the ghosts of past failures reincarnate as future misfortunes. He was young; life was before him. All was not yet lost. If the wild enterprise on which he was now bent succeeded he might yet come into his own, see German George fly back to his own country, while he stepped the first minuet at St. James's.

2

Twilight was falling when the King entered Paris, and as he passed the lane leading from the *Nid au Bois* a horseman came from it whom he recognized as the Prince d'Auvergne. He drew in his horse, afraid of being known in spite of his mask, and followed at a little dis-

tance. Then, as the blue cloak and the grey horse passed a group of trees, four men sprang from their shadow and surrounded the Prince. He drew his sword, but the men, common thieves, had no scruple about fair play, and one was just bringing down a heavy club on his head from behind when the wrist holding it was nearly severed by the fierce downward stroke of a dagger. The yell of agony which followed made the other three turn to see their new assailant, and in that moment James put a second out of action by pinking him in the right shoulder with his rapier. The chief of the band, however, renewed his attack on the Prince, whose grey wheeled just too slowly to avoid the dagger thrust which caught its rider in the thigh. The third, finding the quickness of James's lightning attack too much for him, took refuge in flight, leaving the King free to tackle the last. There was a couple of minutes' breathless fight, without feints or finesse, then a quick turn of James's wrist sent the other's sword flying, and he too fled. James caught the Prince just as he was slipping from his saddle, laid him on the ground and made some job of staunching the worst flow of blood from the cut in his thigh. Presently the Prince opened his eyes, and a puzzled look in them was succeeded by one of recognition, for in the fight the King's mask had been torn off and the first rays of the rising moon shone full on his face.

"Your Majesty," said d'Auvergne, "I have to thank you for my life." Then, as James's hand went to his face, "If you desire your presence in Paris to remain secret, I am as the grave."

He struggled to his feet, and clutched the grey's mane to prevent himself falling.

"I will come as far as your hotel with you, Prince; I have not François' skill as a leech, and if that bandage slips you may faint again."

They rode together as far as the Hotel d'Auvergne.

"You will be all right now, so au revoir," said the King as the door was opened.

"And you? Where are you going?"

"To-night where fate leads me; to-morrow where I hope to lead fate."

"Sire, you will do me a great pleasure as well as an honour if you will be my guest while you are in Paris. None shall know of your presence. You shall come and go as you will."

"None?" asked James with a smile.

"Not even Olive, though I know your Majesty trusts her as I do. I am in your debt for my life, and the d'Auvergnes are bad debtors."

James dismounted and held out his hand.

"I am grateful. It was doubtless my good angel who led me that way."

Discreet enquiries the next day revealed the fact that the Regent was out of Paris and would only return in time for the masked ball that night. James smiled to himself. The masked ball at the Palais Royal might easily give him a chance of the interview he sought with the Duke of Orleans; it might also gain him another, with Margaret, whom he would know, though she would not know him. He suddenly realized at this point that he had been abroad all day, had eaten nothing since an early breakfast of chocolate and rolls, and was most infernally hungry. At the end of a narrow winding street hung the sign of a *pâtissier,* and he went into the dark, empty shop. In answer to his call came a little old man like a frightened grey mole.

"But yes, Monsieur, a venison pasty and a bottle of Burgundy. If Monsieur will honor me by coming into my own room, but he must stoop. He is so tall and the doors are so low."

"Your house is old," said James as he sat down at a table covered with a cloth of coarse but spotless linen.

"Terribly old, but hundreds of years," whispered the host, casting a glance behind him as if he expected grisly ghosts to steal upon him from the bare stone walls. "My daughter will bring your dinner."

He disappeared, and the table was laid by a charmingly pretty girl, whose hair and eyes matched the golden-brown of her linen dress. Women, except his mother and sister, had played no part in James's life, but about this girl and her talk there was a freshness and virginal beauty reminiscent of cool mountain brooks, untrodden dew and the morning song of birds. Suddenly and inconsequently his mind went back to the exquisite freshness of that spring dawn when the blackbird's notes had filled the translucent air with an unearthly purity that had sounded again in the chanting of the nuns in the Chaillot convent chapel.

He smiled at the girl as he cut the venison pasty.

"Evidently, Mademoiselle, you baked this pastry to match the golden-brown of your hair and dress. It is delicious, light as spring air. Your future husband is to be envied."

She smiled shyly and blushed.

"Who knows? I may not have one, Monsieur, in spite of Papa."

She went out as the old man came in, carrying very carefully a squat green bottle, from which he filled James's glass.

"This is indeed a feast for the gods," said James, when he had drunk. "I told your daughter her husband was to be envied. With such food and drink you should make a fortune."

The little man wrung his hands, and crept close, still peering behind him as if in mortal terror.

"Ah, Monsieur, it is not my fault that I cannot pay my rent, but since I refused to let my cellar to them everything has gone wrong. To whom? I cannot tell you, and when I said so to the Prince d'Auvergne's agent who comes for the rent, he laughed at me."

"So the Prince d'Auvergne is your landlord. He is a friend of mine, and if you like I will say a word to him in your favour."

"Ah, Monseigneur, if you will, Geneviève and I will pray daily for you. But even then——"

He burst into tears, flung himself on his knees and caught the King's hand.

"Even then how can I escape them? How save Geneviève from them? She is such a good girl. All her life she has desired nothing but to be a nun."

"Why not?"

"It is the Visitation Convent at Chaillot she has set her heart upon, but we have not the means for the dot, and though she does not know it she was not my daughter nor born in marriage bed."

James laid some gold louis on the tables, stood up and drew on his long gloves of grey Spanish leather.

"That might be arranged," he said. "But these mysterious people, who are they and what do you fear?"

The man locked the door, mopped the sweat from his face with shaking hand and whispered an incoherent story.

"The little masked Abbé who wanted my cellar, he insisted on coming down to see it. It is older even than the rest of the house, with a vaulted roof and a recess at one end as if an altar had stood there. He said it was just what he wanted, offered me a rent three times what we pay for the house, but said we must never go down. He alone was to have the key, and the door from our passage to the stairs down to the cellar must be blocked, only the way into the street left."

"Why did you not take his offer?"

"Geneviève saw and heard him through the chink of the door, and she said no, evil was there. I told him the cellar next door was the same as mine and might be hired. He got it just before Christmas. Before he went he gave me five louis to say naught of his visit, and I never did till now."

"Then you were richer by his visit, and I do not see what you have to fear."

"There is a little hole in my cellar wall which enables me to see a part of the one next door. Will Monseigneur come down with me?"

He locked the door into the street, lit a candle and led the way down a stone stair all green and slippery with damp. As they reached cellar-level there was a scuffling as a family of rats dispersed, and a heavy flop-flop which made James loosen his sword, till he saw it was only a huge yellow toad moving to a more remote corner. Finger to lip, the man took him by the arm and guided him towards a gleam of light, till through a hole made by the dislodging of a small stone he could see into the next cellar.

A lamp was burning behind a red glass somewhere out of sight, and by its dim light he saw that the recess held a long stone slab, covered at one end with test-tubes, large bottles of many-coloured liquids, queer-shaped phials, pestle, mortar, and a tiny flame under a large circular glass vessel which seemed to seethe and bubble as if with some obscene form of life. There was nothing visible but the paraphernalia of chemical research, or the search of the alchemist for the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone which turns all to gold. Yet, as James stood there, there grew upon him a sense of fear so strong that he felt it rise, as it were, through a chink

in the depths of his own personality till it threatened to submerge the very citadel of his soul.

Stronger and stronger it grew, till it swallowed up the first aversion and horror and the physical nausea which had accompanied them. Outward things began to grow dim. Here, in this temple of Satan, where men who worshipped evil celebrated the ghastly blasphemy of the Black Mass in which the greatest supernatural power is deflected from good to corruption, this devilish horror began to take to itself a personality, began to materialize into a beauty wholly hellish, insidiously fascinating, till mind grew dark and the will swooned before it.

With a last despairing effort of will James drew the Crucifix from his breast while his white lips soundlessly framed the Holy Name; and the next thing he was clearly conscious of was being seated in the little room where he had dined while the old man held a glass of wine to his lips.

He drank the wine and spoke in a whisper.

"Have you seen or heard anything?"

"No, they hang the walls with some red and black stuff, so that one cannot see through. One hears a muttering as it might be a priest saying Mass. They began at Christmas, but it is not regular. They came at Easter, and always at the full moon."

"The night after to-morrow is full moon," answered James, as he pulled out his laced handkerchief and wiped away the cold sweat which was pouring down his face.

"That is why I am so afraid. The little Abbé came last night to ask about Geneviève. I told him she wanted to be a nun, so he smiled and said he would fetch her the evening after next to see the Mother Superior. Later I want down and saw him through the hole without a mask."

"What was he like?"

"He has a face like a bird, and stutters a little when he talks. He was saying something about a beautiful girl, and the one with him said something I could not quite hear about a virgin and flesh."

"Who was the other?""

The question rang out so sharply that the old man jumped.

"I could not see him, but his voice was strange, low and very tired—empty, as it were."

James crossed himself as he murmured:

"*Mon dieu!* Can such a thing be possible?"

Then he spoke quickly.

"I will speak to the Prince about your rent, but on no account must you let Geneviève out of the house nor out of your sight and hearing unless I return and you accompany us to the Convent at Chaillot."

Immediately on his return to the hotel d'Auvergne James sent a note to the Mother Superior at Chaillot and received an answer just as he sat down to supper with his host.

"You are *triste, Sire,*" said the Prince. "That is not the humour for a masked ball."

"One does not feel gay when one stumbles upon something so horrible that it does not seem possible."

"Then perhaps it is impossible."

"I have a service to ask of you, *mon ami.*"

"What you will, Sire, I am still in your debt, and ever shall be."

James told of his dinner at the *pâtisserie* in the Rue d'Auvergne and of Geneviève, but not of her father's fear, the next cellar and its tenants. When he had done the Prince gave him a sidelong glance of amusement.

"A charming little adventure, Sire. As you describe the girl one senses her charm. Rumour has it that you are not usually adventurous with the fair sex."

"For once rumour speaks the truth. I have never loved a woman except my mother and sister. As for this little one, read that."

He tossed across the table the Mother Superior's consent to Geneviève's immediate reception as a postulant, but the Prince, before reading it, glanced at the square emerald ring.

"I see you still wear the Prince of Este's ring, Sire?"

"And he mine, I hope, since we have not met again since that night when he escaped Stair and you played the Good Samaritan to him as you are now doing to me. Would you allow me to increase my debt to you by lending me a dress for the masked ball?"

"I have a costume of an Egyptian priest in which none will know you, and since I am not going you shall have my card of entry. I promised Olive to spend the evening at the *Nid au Bois,* where doubtless I shall listen to much talk of Your Majesty, shall smile and be silent."

"And I shall perhaps not smile, though I may be silent."

"I will set you down at the Palais Royal. It is little out of my way."

The masked ball was in full swing when James arrived. The Regent and the Abbé Dubois had both been in the great hall, but the Abbé had left under plea of business and the Duke of Orleans had last been seen in the garden. Then, as James was about to go out, he saw Margaret taking her place in the dance. He knew her from the Proserpine dress, and suddenly he wondered how it was that the "nymphs" of Mademoiselle de Chausseraye's circle should be so interested in her and

her dress that even François had brought back its description. He stood for a moment watching her. This was no longer the girl he had seen at Gorntully, a little awkward and shy, with an old-world aroma, and dressed in a brocade that had belonged to her mother—nor the fury with pale face and blazing eyes who had denounced him at Montrose.

A woman touched his arm, and fearing recognition in this blaze of light, he went out into the garden. With that power of impersonal and aloof detachment common to the artist and the mystic, he appreciated that outburst of hysterical scorn at its true value, knew it for the inevitable reaction after that brief time of high hopes and thrilling adventure. He understood that to Margaret, as to others in Scotland, he had been the Cause, a "prince of dreams" only because he was the rightful king and the one hope of legitimate monarchy, and that by his apparent flight he seemed to have set the final seal of failure on the Jacobite hopes. As always he had been a symbol, not a person, a king not a man. But now for an hour he resolved to be himself—to be free, unknown, without position or responsibility, at liberty to seek adventure and his own desires.

He felt again a hand upon his arm, and the woman who had touched him in the hall spoke.

"Will you not dance with me? Then we will walk down this yew alley."

He hesitated. Where had he heard that voice before? Then the hand on his arm drew him under an arch in the yew hedge, slipped down and caught his hand—and he remembered and drew sharply away.

"Mademoiselle Granby," he said, "I regret that I am not at liberty to accompany you further."

"Sire, it is for your own safety that I would have you do so."

"You know me?"

"Others also know of your presence. Lord Stair——"

"He is well served. No doubts he pays well."

She tore off her mask and he saw her green eyes gleam in the shadow of her lace hood.

"Do you think me a spy?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"That evening we met at Mademoiselle de Chausseraye's you were the decoy who enabled Stair's men to capture the Prince of Este."

"He told you that? *You,* Sire, should know better. I will confess and hide nothing from you. I did indeed come to Paris as a Hanoverian spy, with forged papers, believing all's fair in love and war, convinced that it was for the service and safety of England that Jacobite plots should be met by plots, and you and your Cause destroyed together."

She was looking up at him with the moonlight full on her face, but he could not be sure if she spoke truth or lies, or that mixture of both which is commoner than either.

"What changed you then?" he asked.

"*You,* Sire," she answered very low, coming close to him and catching his hand again. "Did I not tell you that my heart beat only for you, held none but you?"

"You mean the Jacobite Cause."

"No, neither the Cause nor the King,—yea, both those, but only because they are you—you the man."

For an instant he stood motionless. He had cried for an hour of freedom to be himself, the man, not the king. Was this how his prayer was granted? She fell suddenly on her knees before him.

"Forgive! Forgive! I ask naught but to serve you!"

He stooped and pulled her to her feet almost roughly, and she swayed towards him.

"Do with me as you will," she whispered. "You are lonely, unhappy, the plaything of adverse fate. Find your hour of freedom and happiness in my love."

"Mademoiselle," he said, drawing himself to his full height, "for your offer of service to our Cause we are grateful. For the rest, that you spoke foolish words in a thoughtless moment shall remain a secret between us."

He stooped under the arch, passed the next alley swiftly, then turned into a shadowed corner to avoid two maskers who passed him slowly. One was tall, dressed in a well-cut but plain coat of bronze velvet, and spoke in a high-pitched, well-bred English drawl.

"Have a care," he was saying to his companion. "You remember what Mr. Congreve says about 'em; and Gad! he should know:

> " 'Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
> Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.' "

They passed out of sight, but as James moved on he gave a little shiver; the words had a sinister application to his own case. He found himself lost in a maze, wandered round and round, to and fro, till a sound of drunken voices and laughter made him again draw out of sight till the roysterers were past. Then, through the thick hedge, came the sound of a low, tired voice.

"Indeed I should be the perfect lover, were I not weary of all things human and divine."

CHAPTER V

THE MASKED BALL

When Lady Mary and Margaret came down into the salon two nights later than the evening of Lord Stair's visit, only Clarice was waiting for them in a Watteau dress which enhanced her ethereal and fairy-like loveliness. Lady Mary was stately in a dress of yellow satin which her mother had worn while lady-in-waiting to Henrietta Maria, while Margaret, as Proserpine, wore the design of some idealist who had dreamed of dressing Racine's "Phèdre" and "Œdipe" in classical draperies instead of the curled wigs, long coats and red-heeled shoes of the *Grand Monarque's* court. The dress represented Proserpine, virginal as when she was snatched from the fields of Enna, but rich with the fruitfulness of the yet unawakened earth. Her silk draperies of tenderest spring green were bound at waist and breast by a broad golden girdle; round her dark hair, done in a heavy coil low on her neck, was a fillet of golden wheat-ears; a great sheaf of white narcissi, clasped in one arm, filled the air with their heavy scent.

"Why is Jules not here to see you?" Clarice cried to Margaret: "I am too disappointed that he should miss such ravishing beauty."

"Where is he?" asked Lady Mary as they went down to the coach.

"I have not seen him since the evening you were down with us. He often comes and goes like that."

It was with difficulty that they fought their way through

the crowd at the Palais Royal, the great building which still held something of the splendour and magnificence of its founder, Cardinal Richelieu. The deafening babble of talk, the tinkle of high-pitched laughter, the click of red heels on polished floors, the chink of sword and spur, the dazzling blaze of thousands of candles that glinted on diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, gleamed on bare arms and breast, on wigs, on hair, plain and powdered, on the rainbow shimmer of silks and satins, brocades and velvets, made a symphony of intoxicating excitement. Lady Mary disappeared into the room where the older men and women were gathering for ombre and basset; and Margaret put an arm round Clarice and guided her to a corner out of the worst press.

"Do you see the two unmasked at the far end of the room?" whispered Clarice: "Monsieur le Duc d'Orleans and the Abbé Dubois."

Margaret saw a tall man in a heavily curled wig, with an aquiline nose and a face which would have been attractive as well as handsome, had it not been coarsened by self-indulgence and stamped in every feature with an *ennui* which seemed to have branded the soul itself. Beside him a small, thin insignificant cleric, whose face she could not see, was talking eagerly, but with a stutter noticeable even at this distance.

"The Duke's face reminds me of someone," mused Margaret. "I know—that portrait of Henri de Navarre in your *salle-à-manger*."

Clarice laughed.

"You are evidently a born courtier. The surest way to the Regent's favour is to tell him he resembles Henry IV, in face, manner, talk and even in vice."

Margaret looked again at the Regent, son of that Philippe of Orleans whom rumour had accused of poisoning his first wife, Henrietta of England; the man

who himself had been accused of the deaths of the grandson of Louis XIV, the saintly young Duc de Bourgogne, and his wife, in order that, on the old King's death, he himself would wield as Regent the unbounded power which now was his. Then she saw the face of the Abbé Dubois—the face described by St. Simon as resembling that of a sand-martin. She remembered tales of this man, son of a small chemist, who had begun life as a servant, had risen to be tutor to the Regent—then Duc de Chartres—and had instilled into this apt pupil an insatiable thirst for evil which, so men whispered, had driven him through the lusts of the flesh to the unbridled scepticism of a curious mind, and beyond, to a spiritual darkness yet more terrible. She turned to ask Clarice something, but found herself alone in this vast and unknown throng. Half afraid, she drew back against a curtain of gold brocade and clasped the white narcissi to her breast.

"Enviable flowers!" whispered a voice at her ear. "May the kind gods change me to a scented bloom that I may die happy after an hour of bliss on thy white breast!"

The speaker was dressed in long silken hose, one red, one yellow, and a belted tunic half green, half purple, with a long pheasant's feather in his peaked hat.

"What is your name?" asked Margaret.

The other laughed as he put to his lips a wooden pipe and played a haunting tune on its five notes.

"I am the Pied Piper of Hamlyn," he answered; "and since none can remain deaf to my calling, will you dance this minuet with me?"

As Margaret took her place opposite him and made her curtsey, she remembered suddenly Piero d'Este's voice as he had given her the King's message about the first minuet at St. James's,—and she thought how

strangely Piero's voice resembled the King's, save perhaps that his, so "strangely engaging," was softer and lower than the Prince's.

As they danced she noticed one who stood out from the shifting kaleidoscope. On his head was a low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat of silver; his short tunic of cloth of gold shot with blue was belted with turquoises and diamonds; the silver caduceus in his hand, the wings at head and heels were also thickly set with diamonds, so that he flashed with every movement. His bare limbs were smooth as a woman's, of a warm honey colour, but hat and mask completely hid both head and face. She watched him all through the dance, his height, his grace, the beauty of his movements which seemed to lend to the stately measure something of the swiftness of flight, the sparkle of dew in the keen air of high hills.

As the minuet finished the Piper drew Margaret into the garden, where between close-cut formal hedges hundreds of fountains threw their spray into the moonlit air.

"You are dreaming of Mercury," mocked the voice at her ear. "Beware. He is a gay deceiver, a thief of hearts and honour."

"How did you guess?"

"I make it my business to probe men's minds, and women's too, so that I may make them dance to my tune."

"Is knowledge power?"

"Yes; and power is the only thing that lasts in the world. Love, friendship, youth, beauty, purity—all dust, blown by the wind and bitter on the lips. But to pull wires, to make puppets dance to what tune one will, to love or hate, greed, lust, fear, ambition—that is to live."

"But it is not happiness."

"Ah, Proserpine, still do you wander, virginal, unawakened, in the fields of Enna! Beware, lest the shadow of Pluto fall on you and you be borne swiftly down into hell."

"I must beware of Pluto and of Mercury? I prefer Mercury!"

"Well spoken!" cried a laughing voice as she saw Mercury beside her, poised so lightly that in the moonlight and the drifting spray he seemed a dream rather than a thing of earth. He caught her hand and drew her back towards the palace.

"This is our dance," he said. "Beside our immortality the world will fade away."

His voice, muffled and low as it was, struck a chord in her memory that thrilled every nerve, yet she could not be sure if it were the King's or the Prince of Este's, then, on the hand that held hers she saw the great diamond signet ring gleam in the moonlight, and believed him to be the King.

For a brief moment Margaret fancied that their swift rush through the cool air was something more than mortal, that, together, her hand in his, they sped through space, treading upon the stars.

As they moved through the mazes of the pavane this strange exultation remained so that the earth was no longer beneath her feet, but the blue heights of the empyrean. Then, as the music of virginals and lutes and violins changed suddenly to the gay, quick lilt of a country dance, she was lifted almost off her feet by strong young arms, while her hair brushed her partner's cheeks, and suddenly they were out again in that magic world of silver moonlight, silver spray and gleaming silver wings.

Mercury drew Margaret down on a marble seat beneath two cypresses. She saw a pulse beating at the base of his strong, brown throat; his breath came quickly be-

tween the parted lips under the lace fringe of his mask, and through it his eyes gleamed.

"Have you never loved?" he asked abruptly.

"Did you not hear the piper say I was still unawakened?"

"Give me your white flowers then."

She looked down at the narcissi in her golden girdle.

"They are dead."

"Yet still sweet in death," he said, and buried his face in their dying fragrance.

She felt the nearness of his beautiful and passionate youth, the warmth of his breath at her breast, and that something which had stirred in her in the spring garden rose now in full strength. She knew passion, the call of youth to youth, hot blood to hot blood; the unending miracle of nature working ceaselessly and tirelessly towards the creation of new life.

He lifted his head and their eyes met.

"Unmask, divine one," he whispered. "Let us make this hour immortal."

As he put up his hand to his own mask there passed beyond the fountain a tall man's figure, clad from breast to feet in a tunic of white linen, the masked face framed by the stiff locks of a black wig and beard. As this strange figure flitted by Margaret felt her companion start beside her, and he was gone in a flash. She ran after him, but none was in sight, neither the hieratic one whom he pursued, nor his own glittering beauty.

She turned to go back to the palace, puzzled and angry, then discovered she had wandered into the maze, went down one path, turned up another, only to find herself deeper and yet deeper among lines of tall hedges that seemed to have no end. There was a babble of voices and laughter, and before she had time to take refuge in a deep arbour of yew beside her, she was surrounded

by a group of noisy maskers. The little she understood of their talk brought the angry blood to her cheeks and set her eyes ablaze, and when one, bolder than the rest, caught her so roughly that her silk tunic tore and he kissed her arm with a mouth that reeked of wine, she struck so fiercely at him that he staggered and fell at the feet of a tall man wrapped from chin to heel in a scarlet domino, who spurned him with his foot and held up a white hand on which blazed a great circle of emeralds and sapphires.

"Goddess, unmask, for I think your face may hold beauty worthy of my eyes," he said. "'Vanity of vanities,' said the wisest of all men, and all is a weariness save love and beauty."

Fear crept over her, then something strange in his voice inspired her.

"Was it thus that your great ancestor, Henri of Navarre, spoke and acted to a woman?"

There was a laugh, then the Regent unmasked and smiled.

"He held, as I do, that this little span of life was given us to enjoy, beauty to satisfy us for an hour, and love to make the endless years crawl by a little faster."

He waved a languid hand, and the others disappeared. Putting an arm about Margaret, he took the flowers from her girdle and flung them underfoot.

"No more for you the virginal fields of Enna, Proserpine," said that low voice, toneless, yet with a strange beauty, as he drew her to the entrance of the arbour. "Pluto awaits his hour of delight."

She made a despairing effort to break from him, but his arm was strong as an iron vice; gave a cry, which he stifled by muffling her mouth in her silken tunic.

"No need to unmask," he breathed into her ear; "so your

body be beautiful, I need never see your face. One hour, one little hour of love, then parting and no regrets. Fear not, adorable nymph, the sight of Eros. Indeed, I should be the perfect lover, were I not weary of all things, human and divine."

Then Margaret knew that hope was dead. She had known the beauty of passion; now she knew the horror of lust, and sank limp in his arms, feeling herself slipping into unfathomable depths of fear and despair.

A quiet voice sounded at the entrance to the arbour.

"Have a care, Monseigneur, lest death lurk in love, like Cleopatra's asp in the bunch of fairest fruit."

The Duke loosed Margaret and swung round to see the figure in white linen tunic and black wig and beard.

"Who are you?" he asked, a note of anger in his voice.

"A priest of Isis, to whom past is present and the future past."

The Duke left Margaret and stepped outside into the moonlight.

"Can you read the future? Many have I tried, but never yet found one that did not fail."

"Found you yet aught in life that did not fail you?" asked the quiet muffled voice. "You have found love but a little lust, knowledge a weariness of the mind, and further——"

The Duke flung out the hand with the great ring gleaming on the taper finger.

"Cease!" he said imperiously. "What is further you cannot know, for it is known only to myself and one other living being."

"To thee and one other mortal; but what of him who is not mortal? Beware! For thou also art immortal, and if this little life, which is but a breath, the passing shadow on a mirror, filleth thee with such un-

utterable weariness, what of that which endureth for all eternity?"

As the Duke moved nearer to the speaker his scarlet cloak slipped from his shoulders and lay about his feet like a pool of blood, while in the moonlight his face gleamed with sweat.

"Peace," he said harshly. "Peace, thou fool! For the soul dies with the body, if indeed there be a soul."

"You deny the existence of God and the soul because your chemical experiments have not shown it to you. How then do you still believe in the bodily presence of Christ in the Sacred Host though no chemical change shows it?"

"How know you I believe that such a change takes place?"

"Why then the cellar in the Rue d'Auvergne?"

The Duke's face went ashen-grey; he put up a shaking hand to dash away the sweat from his eyes, then drew off the emerald and sapphire ring and held it out.

"The price of silence?" asked the other. "You cannot bribe me. Neither do I betray."

"Nay, the entry to my secret *appartement*. Since you know what none know, and will not reveal it, you can also tell me of the future. Come when you will—to-morrow—and ask what you will."

"To-day, since already the sky pales with dawn."

With a rapid sign of assent the Duke went, and Margaret crept out into the waning moonlight.

"How can I thank you?" she cried, holding out her hands. "If you had not come——"

She broke off with a shudder. He stood very still and in the piercing gaze of the eyes shadowed under the mask by that strange artificial hair and beard there was something terrifying.

"How can I show my gratitude?" she said. "How help or serve you?"

He flung a hand out sharply towards her, and she saw the green gleam of the Este ring on the third finger.

"That cloak, Mademoiselle, 'twill serve to cover you for the moment."

She looked down, saw her bare shoulders, her tunic torn and crumpled, stooped for the cloak, flung it about her, and coiled up the heavy masses of her hair. She had fancied a note of bitter scorn in the muffled voice, and sudden horror filled her.

"You do not believe," she stammered, "you cannot think that I was a willing victim to that beast of prey?"

He lifted his head, listening like a hunted stag, but not to her. Through the air that was growing chill and pale with dawn sounded a quaint air of five notes—the tune the piper had played on his wooden pipe. The stranger thrust the Regent's ring into his breast and was gone.

There was a sharp word of command, the ring of spur and sabre on stone, and round the corner came a group of men in livery, with drawn swords and pistols in their hands. By the light of the lanterns they carried, Margaret saw Lord Stair, unmasked, dressed in the coat of dark blue velvet piped with scarlet.

A thin hand shot out from the hedge behind her and gripped her arm, while Jules de Sarci's voice hissed in her ear:

"For the love of God! hold them in play as long as you can!"

She drew into the blackness of the arbour, pulling the hood of the domino over her head, but in a moment the gleam of lanterns revealed her; she was seized and led out.

"None here but this woman, my lord."

"He was here but an instant ago, and none passed to warn him. He must still be here."

There was a rustling and crackling of boughs as men thrust arms and swords through the thick greenery but their search was fruitless.

Then an English voice drawled.

"What of the scarlet domino, my lord? You remember that Lord Nithsdale escaped the Tower but a couple of months ago in his wife's cloak and hood?"

"Gad, yes! Off with your cloak, Madam. You're over tall for a woman."

Margaret held the scarlet domino tightly about her and drew herself up to her full height; every moment's delay was a moment gained in answer to de Sarci's agonized appeal.

Stair repeated his order sharply in French, then as there was no reply by word or movement, he stepped suddenly forward and snatched away the cloak with a violence that rent the silk from top to bottom.

"You, Margaret Ogilvie!" he exclaimed in amazement.

She threw up her head and boldly met the gaze of coldly passionate hate.

"Are you satisfied now, my Lord Stair, that he whom you seek is not here?"

His brows met in a frown, then he gave a wicked little laugh.

"Faith! Mistress Meg, you have served my purpose very prettily till now. You must e'en serve it till the end."

Her eyes blazed as she took a step towards him.

"How dare you say I've served your vile ends? You come like Judas into the garden with an armed band to betray and capture, but I defy you!"

"Very pretty, Mistress; very well spoken, I vow. But things betray as well as tongues."

He stooped and picked up something which her foot had sent rolling to his feet. It gleamed greenly in his outstretched hand.

"This ring?"

She bent forward as if to examine the huge square emerald, set in a fine filigree of gold, but already she had known it for Piero d'Este's Borgia ring, which must have flown off in that dramatic gesture pointing to her bare shoulders and the cloak.

"Do you recognize it?" rang out the sharp question, and her eyes met his squarely as she took the ring and slipped it on the third finger of her left hand.

"Certainly, Lord Stair. Why should I not recognize my mother's ring, made for her ancestress, Lucrezia Borgia?"

The instant of silence was broken by that pleasant lazy English voice.

"Let me perish, but I think the lady has your lordship fairly checkmated."

Stair turned a face pale with cold fury.

"I have as yet scarce begun. What she knows I will know."

For the first time Margaret saw the other. He was dressed in a plain but well-cut coat of bronze velvet and was unmasked, and as his blue eyes met hers she recognized him as Captain Hunter, who had dined at Master Forbes's the day she had ridden to Perth. He looked at her steadily, and she fancied a quizzical gleam in his eyes, the flicker of a smile at the corner of the well-cut mouth, which were strangely comforting even though he gave no sign of recognition.

Stair's voice rang out.

"Now, Mistress, I waste no more time. Where's the man was with you?"

"I know not. He vanished the moment before your men appeared."

"You know not! You know not! You'll tell me next you know not who he was! By God! I'll have the gardens searched till we find him, and no more questions asked, unless you satisfy me here and now, why he came and whence and whither he's gone."

Then Margaret decided to stake all on one desperate throw. If it failed, things were no worse than now—nay, better, for a little more delay would have been gained. And if it succeeded the hunted man might make good his escape. She threw an appealing glance at the Englishman.

"Perhaps Captain Hunter can help you," she said.

"Hunter? Gad! man, what are you doing in this? You don't know Margaret Ogilvie."

"'Tis not the first time I've had the pleasure of sunning myself in her radiant glances," drawled Hunter: "Nor of toasting her *beaux yeux*."

"You've been with her lately then—to-night?"

Hunter took snuff deliberately before he answered.

"Is it necessary, milor, to keep a time-table and account for each half hour spent at a masked ball? Faith! I had no idea that the Duke of Orleans was such a demned strict host, nor that he had appointed your lordship Grand Inquisitor of morals."

Stair flushed a little then, like a hawk swooping, he snatched the domino from the ground.

"The Regent, yes, 'twas he was wearing this to-night. So that's the way of it, is it? Zounds! I'd not have thought it. Cover yourself, girl, you'll be chill in the dawn air with those bare shoulders. Captain Hunter, you're a devilish quixotic gentleman. I'll be gone."

He flung the torn scarlet silk at Margaret as he might have thrown a bone to a cur and with a curt order to his men, left, followed in silence by the Englishman.

Margaret wrapped the domino about her, and shivering, yet exultant, ran in the opposite direction. She had foiled and baffled Stair and made possible the escape of the King, whom she fancied to be Piero d'Este. Was not this enough to wipe out the memory of that mad, cruel moment of folly?

She found herself beside the cypresses where she had been with Mercury. She paused, all the experiences and sensations of the last hour, all wonder as to whether he had recognised her, swept away by the memory of that moment when his low voice had gone hoarse and his breath had thrilled warm at her breast; then she heard a step and found him beside her.

"Will you not now unmask," she said, "and make the hour immortal?"

He gave an exclamation of wonder, then the scarlet domino slipped from her and she stood in her dress of green, belted with gold.

"Proserpine!" he cried. "The gods have indeed heard my prayer!"

He caught her in his arms, kissed hair, throat and shoulders, then their lips met, for a long, shuddering moment that seemed to hold an eternity in its passionate union of body, mind and heart. She felt the clasp of his strong arms about her, the hard strength of his lean young body against her, the fierce beating of his heart against hers. Her southern blood burned in a consuming fire never lit till now, and as at length their lips slowly parted she caught his head between her hands and whispered:

"Unmask! Unmask!"

"And you!"

She loosed him and put up her hands to undo her mask

then, with a low cry, Piero d'Este suddenly seized her left hand and twisted it till the Borgia ring gleamed, while, with his other hand, he tore off her mask.

"That ring? How came you by it?" he cried.

"It fell from his finger just before Lord Stair——"

At that moment Clarice's voice sounded near them, calling Margaret, and as she came into sight Piero leapt over the hedge and was gone.

CHAPTER VI

CROSSED BLADES

"You were not disappointed last night?" asked Lady Mary from the depths of her four-poster, where she had taken her midday meal.

"It was not uneventful," answered Margaret.

The old grey eyes glanced keenly from under the lace cap.

"Did you find the dozen beaux, my dear, or one lover?"

Margaret flushed as she repeated:

"My heart, my loyalty are all for the King."

"Otherwise the Pretender. Well, everyone to his taste."

The girl suddenly flamed.

"And you, Aunt Mary, do you expect me to believe that you are loyal to the Elector of Hanover, that German swine, with his poor imprisoned, persecuted wife and his hideous German mistresses?"

"If you take such a high moral tone," came the dry answer, "what of your dear James's father? King Charles II said that his brother's harlots were so demned ugly that the priests must have given 'em as a penance, and if they had wit, the Duke had none to perceive it."

He repented."

"There's time for King George to do the same, though I can scarce picture him under a Jesuit's thumb."

"That German princeling has no right to the throne."

"The right of the people's will."

"They have no right to dispossess the legitimate king. And I wonder how many of them wished to."

"Now, child, with the good Presbyterian upbringing Jock Forbes gave ye, would ye wish to see a Papist king on the throne of England and Scotland and the Jesuits absolute, giving place and power to whom they will, and breaking and deposing whom they will, as did Père la Chaise and the others under Louis XIV?"

"That would not happen in England."

"Faith no!" rapped out the old lady; "we've too much sense. What Britain wants is a sound Protestant government and the power in the hands of them that are fit to use it—the great Whig aristocrats. Where a king has absolute power, as had Louis XIV here in France, what happens when his successor is a child?"

"I suppose the regent has it, as the Duke of Orleans has now."

"Yes; 'Woe to the country whose king is a child!' When one man holds all together, the whole structure of government and society crumbles when he dies. It is a house built on sand. Perhaps in our day, or in your children's, you will see the destruction of the old France, rotted and decayed from within by self-seeking and corruption. Now, the Stuarts have ever sought to make themselves absolute. Charles I lost his head. Charles II managed to keep the throne for twenty-five years because he was clever enough to realize the strength of the great families and the Protestant feeling of Parliament, and to know when to give in."

"At any rate, Aunt Mary, if the late king lost the throne, it was for the sake of his religion, even if that religion be a false one."

"Nonsense, child! He lost it because he tried to force religious toleration on the country, and no good Protestant wants such a thing. Where would the Church of England

be if Papists and Quakers were at liberty to carry on their religion openly? At my age, my dear, politics are a matter of prejudice; at yours, of personality. If the Pre——, well, I'll compromise and say the Chevalier—resembled a pig in appearance, manners and morals, as King George does, your loyalty would not burn with so keen a flame. Now trot out into the garden, and I shall sleep till supper-time."

Margaret went lazily down the stairs, and hearing Clarice's voice in the garden, she stopped half-way to look out of the window. Clarice was talking earnestly to a tall man dressed in black from the little silk cap on his close wig and the silk stock over his cravat of frilled lawn down to his buckled shoes. Then they moved towards the house, he limping and leaning on a stick.

"Monsieur de St. Etienne!" exclaimed Margaret in surprise, and Jules de Sarci's voice answered at her shoulder:

"Do you know him, then. Yes, of course you met at Scoon."

"Who is he?"

"The King's Jesuit confessor. I mean King James's, of course, for Jesuits are very *démodés* at the moment at Versailles. Père Michel Letellier, the old King's confessor, has been banished and 'tis the turn of the Society's arch-enemy, Cardinal de Noailles, who, as Archbishop, has deprived the Jesuits of all faculties but for parish work."

Margaret stood staring into the garden as if she had seen a snake, and Jules began to laugh.

"Now I understand why there was such need of secrecy about Père de St. Etienne in Scotland," he said; "and why he could only celebrate Mass privately in the King's room. Shall you also be afraid of me when you hear I

was educated by the Jesuits at the famous *Collège Louis le Grand* in the Rue St. Jacques?"

Margaret looked at him, half puzzled, half horrified, as he continued, quizzically:

"But every one of the most aristocratic among my three thousand fellow scholars, I assure you. We used often to act before the old King dramas composed by the fathers, with a cast from the greatest families in France, not to mention Polish Palatines and other petty princelings."

"Did Monsieur de St. Etienne teach you there?"

"No; the year I was seven and went to college he left for China with Père Bouvet and half a dozen other Jesuits."

"China! I remember he told me he had got the scars on his wrist in China."

"And his limp. He was so badly tortured by the Tartars that it is almost a miracle he is alive. If China interests you, come into my little cabinet for a moment."

He opened a door and followed her into a little room with an oriel window looking into the garden and curtained with yellow, undyed silk. On the polished floor was one rug, the Chinese characters in a wonderful blue on a fawn ground. A richly-carved stand held half a dozen pieces of ivory, the carving fine as lace, delicate at a butterfly's wing, some small bronzes and a couple of bowls with a shimmering rainbow lustre. Jules took from a casket a scroll of parchment in Chinese, with exquisitely painted illustrations.

"One of the Chinese books which the Emperor of China sent by Père Bouvet as a present to Louis XIV," he said. "The rest of the things were brought home by my father's brother, who also was a Jesuit missioner in China. The Emperor made him a mandarin of the first

order for his proficiency in mathematics and astronomy. I regret that none of his intellect has descended to me."

Margaret bent over one of the ivory carvings, a half-opened rose, nestling among its buds and leaves in magic beauty.

"It is so lovely it must be a fairy gift," she cried.

"Will you make it one? See, you can thread it about your neck on this little gold chain—the White Rose."

"I cannot take such a beautiful thing."

"That is why you should, like to like."

She bent her head and he slipped over it the little ivory on its gold chain.

"But no, Mademoiselle, the thanks are due from me that you have accepted it. Is it not a strange paradox of human nature that the men who create such exquisite beauty should also be capable of such devilish cruelty?"

"You mean Monsieur de St. Etienne's wounds?"

"He is but one of many, and he has returned alive. Ten out of every twenty Jesuit missionaries die before they even reach Pekin, yet there are always more volunteers among them than room on the ships sailing to China."

"It is wonderful. To care so much that one is willing to sacrifice everything!"

"Would you not sacrifice yourself, Mademoiselle, generously, willingly?"

"For my religion? Oh, no, it does not mean enough to me."

Jules came near and spoke softly.

"Yet there is something you care for more than for yourself."

"The Cause," she answered; then her eyes fell before his as she added: "And the King."

She was conscious of his gaze on her, searching and persistent, then he broke the silence.

"You were splendid last night. I could not give you longer warning. Stair's arrival took me by surprise. Had you recognized me before?"

"Not till I heard you play the tune the second time. It is queer how a mask and strange dress disguise a person. That reminds me, I have something here which should be returned. I picked it up—the Prince of Este's ring."

She drew it from her finger and Jules took it with a curled lip.

"It is possible that I may have the supreme felicity of seeing him, since it appears that he is in Paris. Come with me to the *Nid au Bois* this afternoon. Clarice is coming, and you have not yet made the acquaintance of the famous 'nymphs' of the Cause."

2

Piero d'Este and Olive Trant were talking in the garden of the *Nid,* where a bed of tulips made a blaze of red and yellow against the grey stone wall. He looked at her in frank admiration as she stood in her dress of green brocade, looped back over an underskirt of rose-red silk, a hood of the same shade thrown over her high-dressed hair and lace fontanges.

"The tulips are like you, Olive," he said—"tall, beautiful, stately. But they lack your sweetness."

He picked a yellow one and held it up like a gold cup.

"To your beauty, *chérie,* and to your beautiful children!"

"If they are beautiful," she laughed, with a little blush, "they will certainly not resemble their father."

"Ah, but how Henri d'Auvergne is to be envied!"

"Foolish one! You do not deceive me. You know you would hate to be married."

"Mon dieu! But what a horrible idea!"

"You have not fallen in love with a Spanish beauty then?"

"You knew I had been to Spain? Is there anything you do not know, adorable witch?"

"Yes, I should like to know the woman who will teach you how to love. You will make a glorious lover. Ah, Pierre, you do not know what you miss in life."

He caught her hands and made her look up at him. His dark hair shone like bronze in the sunshine; the olive skin of jaw and cheek was smooth as polished metal; his white teeth gleamed between the laughing red lips; his eyes were golden under their black lashes like a sunlit stream between its reed-fringed banks.

"Do I look unhappy?"

"So happy that in Scotland they would say you were fey."

"Do not remind me of that barbarous country! There is *la petite Mademoiselle* calling us. Why must all good things end so soon?"

Mademoiselle de Chausseraye, in a dress of dove-grey silk shot with rose, stood at the top of the steps leading into the garden.

"Mon prince," she called, "the Oglethorpes have just arrived. Madame la Marquise is prostrate with migraine after the *bal masqué*. I see you have your violin with you, and we are dying to hear that so sad tune you learnt in Scotland."

Piero followed Olive up the steps, then, as she went in, stood a moment looking down into the garden. The white flowers of an early clematis garlanded the French window behind him; the bees buzzed in it. The birds sang among the red and white taper-shaped blossoms

which rose above the green fingers of the horsechestnut leaves; in the room the women chattered gaily and inconsequently. The sunlit air was full of the scent of pink and white may, the languorous perfume of white and purple lilac; the blossom of a laburnum dripped its golden rain against the cool grey stone of the house; over all was the cloudless May sky, the warm afternoon sunshine. And in Piero's heart too was sunshine, happiness and eager anticipation. In an hour or less he would be again with James, whom he had not seen since they had parted that stormy February night nearly three months ago.

He went in, unwrapped his precious Stradivarius, tuned it to the little spinet that stood in a corner of the room and began to play the Ogilvie Lament. The notes throbbed and quivered through the dim, scented air, the despairing heart-broken cry of the exile who can never return.

He broke off suddenly.

"That is too sad, that one! To-day I must have something gayer!"

Olive crossed to the spinet as he played a few gay notes.

"Sing then," she said.

He laid down the violin, stood beside Olive and sang Lorenzo di Medici's immortal quatrain:

"Quant'é bella giovanezza,
Che se fugge tuttavia;
Chi vuol esser lieto, sia;
Di doman non c'é certezza!"

As the last notes of his velvet baritone voice floated into the sunshine the murmur of women's voices began again.

"We heard an incredible story, but incredible," said Fanny Oglethorpe: "that the King was seen at the *bal masqué* last night."

"Impossible, my dears!" cooed Mademoiselle; "he is at Avignon. I had a letter but a day or two ago."

There was a chorus of questions.

"What news? How is he? Did he send me a message? Or me?"

Mademoiselle de Chausseraye drew a letter from her bosom, kissed it and handed it to Olive.

"You shall read it to us, *chérie*."

Piero had picked up his violin and tucked it under his chin. There was a little smile on his lips as he played a scarcely audible *pizzicato* accompaniment to Olive's deep voice.

"I have just received yours," she read; "and am much obliged for the trouble you have taken for me; but by all I can learn there is nothing new and everything is in an uncertainty everywhere. It is useless to entertain ourselves with sad reflections and distant hopes; time and patience will at last, if it please God, produce good result. Meanwhile one must not abandon oneself to melancholy. You will know how to distinguish true friends; they are rarer than ever."

There was silence. It seemed that the Stuart doom shadowed even the spring sunshine, as it had checked even the babble of enthusiastic feminine devotion. Then Fanny Oglethorpe looked out of the window.

"The gate is open, Mademoiselle—visitors. It is the de Sarci coach."

Piero frowned.

"Mademoiselle Clarice," continued Fanny.

Piero's brow cleared again as he wrapped his violin in its silk scarf and took it out into the hall. As he came back into the room Jules de Sarci met him in the doorway.

"I have a commission which shall be executed without delay," Jules said, holding out the Borgia ring, "to return you this."

"*Corpo di Bacco!* How came you by that?" exclaimed Piero; then he broke off and slipped on the ring before continuing with an ironical little bow: "Pardon, Monsieur le Marquis, for the indiscretion of my question. Assuredly some generosities should remain discreetly veiled."

Before Jules had time to answer, Mademoiselle de Chausseraye slipped two plump hands round Piero's arm.

"Dear Prince," she murmured, drawing him into the room, "I must present you to our new nymph—one of those so loyal and devoted Scots."

Then he saw Margaret. His whole body stiffened and the smile froze on his lips.

"Let me present you to Mademoiselle Ogilvie, whom I think you have not met."

He drew himself up and spoke in so low a tone that the group talking by the window could not hear.

"Mademoiselle de Chausseraye, I regret to say that Mademoiselle Ogilvie and I *have* met before. Still more do I regret to be compelled to say that, if she remembers our last meeting, she will need no explanation as to why I refuse the honour of her further acquaintance."

Margaret shrunk into the corner as if she had been struck across the face; Mademoiselle de Chausseraye's eyes and mouth opened wide in amazement. Then Jules de Sarci, who had been standing unnoticed behind Piero, stepped forward. His face was dead-white except for a staring patch of rouge on each cheekbone, but he spoke quietly, with a little drawl.

"I also, Monsieur le Prince, regret, I very much regret, to have to say to you that your cravat does not please me."

"Can one survive such a devastating misfortune?"

"It is no longer the fashion."

Piero looked at Jules insolently from head to foot.

"How do you suggest that the tragedy be remedied, Monsieur le Marquis de Sarci?"

Jules shrugged his thin shoulders and drew out a snuff-box of Chinese lacquer-work.

"But easily, Monsieur le Prince d'Este. It can be arranged in the garden, now."

"With your permission, Mademoiselle, we will take a stroll in the garden. And when one returns it is to be hoped——"

Piero's eyes flicked over Margaret, rendering further words unnecessary.

His hand was already at the hilt of his rapier when Mademoiselle swooped between him and Jules on the top step with a hand on each.

"I beg of you," she panted. "You must not! You cannot! You dare not!"

"Unfortunately, Mademoiselle, the Marquis de Sarci is inexorable."

"Unless, of course, the Prince would prefer not to remain in civilised society," drawled Jules. "Since he is apparently not accustomed to it."

Piero lifted his left hand and for an instant it looked as if he were going to strike Jules across the face with the long riding gloves held in it, then he went down the steps, and Jules followed in silence.

Margaret remained as if turned to stone in her corner; Clarice, seeing something was amiss, ran to Mademoiselle on the steps, where they were joined by Olive, with Fanny and Anne Oglethorpe each clinging to an arm.

The two men on the grass saluted with their drawn swords; the sun glinted on the crossed blades, and Piero attacked, lunging and recovering; then, as their blades

joined in quarte, he attacked *en flançonnade,* which Jules parried by a parade of quarte.

The garden gate had opened noiselessly, and the King came in unnoticed. He saw the huddled group of women at the window, the flashing of rapier blades as Piero disengaged over Jules' wrist towards his body under the arm. Then the King's voice rang out with unwonted sharpness.

"What is this?"

As the points of the rapiers dropped to the ground, Mademoiselle de Chausseraye was at the King's side.

"Sire! Sire!" she panted. "Stop them, or we are all undone."

Jules sheathed his blade and bowed.

"Sire, it is madness that you should be here; *here* of all places, after last night."

"Monsieur le Marquis, have I to ask your permission for my movements? Explain your own."

Jules looked at Piero, who remained silent, his eyes still blazing, the knuckles of his brown hand white with the fierceness of his grip on the hilt of his rapier, whose point rested on the grass.

"Since Monsieur le Prince leaves explanations to me," bowed Jules, "I regretted to say that I did not like his cravat."

"What folly is this?" exclaimed the King angrily; then, turning to Piero: "What does this mean?"

"That he insulted me."

James pointed at Piero's rapier, which he sheathed sulkily.

"Have you all nothing better to do than to quarrel like a pack of silly children?"

Piero threw up his head angrily.

"I stand insults from no man."

"And you, Monsieur de Sarci," continued the King,

"are you not shamed of forcing a quarrel on so trivial a pretext?"

James's anger was rare, but when roused, as now, he could be coldly terrifying.

"I regret, Sire, that I cannot withdraw."

"Nor I," said Piero curtly.

"Am I alone to have no regrets?" asked James ironically. "*I*, the king, regret, gentlemen, that you have so little care of my person, so little devotion to my Cause. Prince of Este, the horses are outside, and I ride for Avignon at once. I came to beg for your company, nay, I did not think it would be necessary to ask, but now, if you decide so, I ride alone."

He turned to Jules.

"Monsieur le Marquis, I cannot command your obedience, since you are bound to me by friendship, not by fealty. I can only appeal to your devotion to the Cause, a Cause which, God knows, needs all friends and all help in this hour of apparent failure. Can I still count on you, or is this indeed farewell?"

He held out his hand. Jules kissed it, and went out into the street without another word. The King looked up at the group of women on the steps.

"Mesdemoiselles, one must be in the fashion, therefore I regret, I very deeply regret, that I may not stay longer than to bid you *au revoir*."

He put on his gold-laced hat, flung one end of his scarlet cloak over his shoulder and moved towards the gate. Then Piero spoke.

"You ride to Avignon now? 'Tis deadly dangerous for you to ride south when Stair knows of your presence here."

"Yet I ride."

"Alone?"

"François is waiting with the horses."

Piero turned and re-entered the house. The King went out into the street. Through the open gate the women saw him mount Sancho, and as he rode off, two lines from the Ogilvie Lament came to Olive's lips:

"He gave his bridle-rein a shake,
With Adieu for evermore, my dear, Adieu for evermore!"

CHAPTER VII

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

At the top of the wooded hill leading to Villeneuve St. Georges François rode up beside the King.

"How far did your Majesty intend to go to-day?"

"We might make Melun, François. Since the evenings are long and the horses fresh, we can easily manage the twenty-eight miles, and shall be sure of a decent inn."

Silence fell again between the two, and as they rode along the valley of the Yères James became conscious of the spring world. The leaves of the willows on the banks of the small deep river danced silvery in the light breeze; the lines of tall poplars cut into the cloudless sky of early evening with the brilliance of enamel. The cows stood almost shoulder-high in the lush grass; the hay-fields were a sheet of yellow buttercups with a lacy background of wild parsley flowers. The air was full of the scent of may, the song of larks, the busy humming of bees, the lazy caw of homing rooks. A spray of white wild rose, already in bud, caught the feather in the King's hat, and he paused to disentangle it, while Sancho seized the opportunity for a mouthful of grass and Minette put up a partridge from the hedge and gave chase. Everywhere was love, joy, beauty, new life and the fullness of it, but in the King's heart darkness and empty despair.

Then, as he was about to move on came the sound of a horse cantering along the road from Paris, and drawing his sword, he wheeled his horse and faced that way. The

horseman came round the corner, and he saw that it was Piero, who pulled up at sight of him.

"You have ridden fast," he said.

The King set Sancho to a trot.

"I wish to reach Melun to-night. You have perhaps joined me to report on the success or failure of your Spanish mission?"

"Since I have not had the opportunity before."

"Eh bien?"

The King spoke French instead of the Italian which they always used together, and Piero gave a quick side-long glance at the grim, stern profile which at the moment wore a striking likeness to Charles II; then, as they rode through Montgeron and entered the wide plain of the Brie he gave a rapid account of his two months in Spain and his endeavours to make Cardinal Alberoni, the all-powerful minister of Philip V, declare himself openly in favour of the Stuart Cause.

He finished as they reached the little village of Lieu Saint, and the King, who had listened in silence, drew rein outside an inn.

"We will sup here. There are still two more hours of daylight, so we can afford half an hour's delay, and feed the horses. François, an omelette and some wine for us, and when you have had your own supper ride on to engage a couple of rooms at the *Grand Monarque*."

He and Piero sat down in silence at a little wooden table in the garden shaded by a pergola of vines. The bees still hummed in the pink flowers of the horsechest-nut, while the young leaves of an oak at the end of the garden glowed like copper in the low rays of the western sun.

"I went to Avignon," said Piero as he finished his omelette. "I could not believe you had gone to Paris, but as none knew where you were I followed on chance.

It was madness for you to risk capture or assassination like that, alone with François."

"Do you dictate to me?"

"No one wishes to dictate to you, only to warn you against such folly."

"It appears that I am a fool as well as mad."

Piero pushed away his empty plate abruptly, poured out some wine and made a grimace as he tasted it.

"I regret," drawled the King, "I very much regret that my service has brought you to fare which offends the delicacy of your palate."

Piero looked at him across the table in a silence which was broken by the clatter of hoofs as François rode out of the yard and trotted off.

The King twirled his cup of wine so that some was spilt on the rough wood; he took out his handkerchief and wiped it up, and lace and lawn were stained as if with blood. Then he lifted his eyes, their red hazel almost black.

"Have I ever complained of any hardship in your service?" asked Piero in a low voice.

"Not to *me*."

Piero started to his feet, his face white.

"Are you trying to force a quarrel on me?"

"Not such a difficult task apparently, judging by the incident at the *Nid au Bois*. We have never quarrelled in twenty-six years, but now——"

"Now?"

"And I was fool enough to believe that not even a woman could spoil our friendship."

"A woman?" exclaimed Piero scornfully. "Do you then know me so little as to believe any woman——"

He broke off suddenly. It *was* a woman, after all, who had been the cause of his quarrel with de Sarci, and so of this bitter anger of James's.

"I am glad to see that Mademoiselle Ogilvie has returned you your ring," said James as he rose from the table. "It must have been at her feet that it fell last night. I should be glad of my own ring."

Piero drew it off and laid it on the table. James put it on and turned to go.

"Do you wish for my company as far as Melun?" asked Piero. "I do not like to let you ride alone."

"That will be no new thing for me. My way has been a lone one in the past and is like to be still more so in the future. I do not wish to take you out of your way."

"Your Majesty may remember that the road to Melun is also the road to my home at Modena."

James lifted his head and their eyes met in a long glance, keen as crossed blades.

"So be it," he said.

When he had mounted and cantered away south he knew by the steady beat of hoofs that Piero rode a little way behind him. Once, during the last eight miles of the journey, as the horses walked up a long hill, Sancho neighed and Roxane whinnied in answer, as if in wonder at this strange separation.

François was waiting at the door of the *Grand Monarque*.

"Two good rooms, next each other," he said proudly; "I was only just in time, for another traveller arrived on my heels and tried to engage one."

James went to his room, locked the door, and stood motionless, staring at the empty hearth, while Minette jumped on the bed, and curled herself up for the night. Presently, however, she ran to the door and began to growl. James crept to it, opened and listened, but could see or hear none. He pulled off his riding-boots and in stockinged feet with a dagger in his hand he crept along the passage. He could see through the open door

into the kitchen, where the landlord, his wife and sons were still at the supper-table. Further on, through the chink of an unlatched door came a gleam of candlelight and a sound of voices. A man was speaking. James could not distinguish the words, but, though they were French, he could have sworn that it was a Scotch voice.

He crept back, stood for a moment outside Piero's door, listened, and finally gently tried the door. It was locked and there was no sound from within. He flung himself on the top of his bed, fully dressed but for coat and boots, wrapped his cloak round him, and thrust the dagger under his pillow while Minette stretched herself full length at the foot of the bed with a sigh of contented comfort.

James blew out the candle, but sleep would not come. His mind and memory worked at high pressure; scenes and people passed vividly before his mind's eye—the supper at the inn, his own and Piero's bitter words, the *Nid au Bois,* Jules, Piero, the ridiculous pretext of their quarrel, the frightened women and his own interview with the Regent earlier in the afternoon.

He lived again every moment of that half hour or less upon which so much had depended, on which he had staked such high hopes. He had arrived masked at the Palais Royal and been refused admission till he had produced the emerald and sapphire ring. Then he had been led through long winding corridors up a narrow stair into a small room, where the spring sunshine filtered dimly through the arabesques of a wooden Moorish lattice. On a low Turkish divan piled with cushions lay the Duke of Orleans, in a gown of brocade patterned with rose and gold. Under the turban of swathed gold tissue the heavy-lidded, lustreless eyes, the high-arched Bourbon nose, the full, drooping mouth, the smooth pale face were lifeless as those of a corpse. Beside him

crouched a girl whose slim brown charms were revealed rather than hidden by the wisp of silver gauze about her. She gave a little cry of fright at the sight of James, his masked face, his great height accentuated by his slenderness and by the piled curls of his auburn wig. Then the Regent spoke in his beautiful, toneless voice.

"You have fulfilled your promise, priest of Isis, and come to tell me of the future."

James did not answer. A sense of unreality crept over him in this dim scented Eastern room, dulling mind and will. The girl's brown beauty and lustrous gazelle eyes were powerless to stir his senses, but here, as in the cellar in the Rue d'Auvergne, he was conscious of a force of evil which waited but for a chink in his armour to steal in and conquer through fear, till mind was darkened and will submerged.

The girl laid her cheek against the Regent's hand and spoke in pretty, broken French.

"Will he tell me how long thou wilt continue to love me?"

"Impossible that I should cease to love thee," drawled the tired voice. "Since I have never done so. 'Tis not a word one applies to a spring chicken, plump, succulent, tender, but unfortunately without *sauce piquante*."

He freed his hand, pointed to the door, and without a murmur she went.

Then James spoke.

"Are you not rash to be left alone with a masked unknown?"

The Duke gave a languid clap of his hands. The silk curtains behind his couch parted to show two gigantic negroes, naked except for head-dresses and loin cloths of striped red and yellow silk, and with bared scimitars in their hands. Then the curtains closed again, hiding them.

"Will Your Majesty not unmask and sit down? 'Tis over-hot here."

James could not repress a start.

"You know me, then, and yet receive me?"

"'Tis why I receive you, a chance of speaking face to face."

James untied his mask, and his clear eyes met the shadowed ones.

"Yes, that is why I came to Paris, in the hope of seeing you."

"All the way from Avignon, at peril of your life, alone but for your valet, none of your friends knowing your whereabouts, your life in your hands, merely to see me? I am deeply flattered, *Altesse,* but 'twas folly, mad folly. Stair will have you in the end."

"By the help of God, no."

"Still I'll back his Lordship. He's subtle, unscrupulous, and vastly determined. 'The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.' The devil can quote scripture, you know."

"Monseigneur," answered James gravely, "'tis not of my safety I am here to speak, but of greater issues. Have I your leave?"

The Duke nodded, then lay back among his pillows, his eyes half-closed, while James went on.

"I need not remind you how true and generous a friend *le grand Monarque* was to my exiled father and mother and to me after my father's death, nor that it was against his own desires and affections that he was compelled to sign the Treaty of Utrecht. Nor will I remind you of my own service in Flanders with the French army."

"France, Sire, does not forget courage such as yours in the field of arms."

"I am here now, Monseigneur, to beg you to reverse

the Treaty of Utrecht, to keep French policy on the old anti-German lines, to help the exiled and unfortunate, to give your whole-hearted support to the Jacobite Cause."

"What should I, or France, gain by so doing?"

James lifted his brows a little disdainfully.

"If, *Altesse,* we are to descend to terms of bargaining, like the old wives in the *Halles,* I see it to your interest and France's to support me with all the means in your power. The young King's life is but a frail thread, should it snap——"

"My dear cousin, Philip V of Spain, feels his foot already on the step of the throne."

"Your claim is stronger. Would it not help you more to have a Catholic king on the English throne rather than a German Protestant?"

"If you were King of England, what then?"

The colour came into James's pale face and his eyes glowed with an inner fire.

"If I were King, by the grace of God, then every man should have freedom to practise his religion. The gaols, the plantations, the penal settlements should no longer be crowded with those whose only crime has been that they refuse to render to Cæsar the things that are God's. No more should torture—the rack, the screw, the Scavenger's Daughter—or barbarous death—the gallows, the cauldron, the axe, the knife—be the fate of those who set God above the State."

"You would not make England Catholic?"

"Could I help but pray that I might live to see her once more a Catholic country, her wounds of schism healed, her darkness made light, herself brought back into the true Church, in submission to the Vicar of Christ?"

The Duke of Orleans smiled.

"A very charming picture, Sire. Will it be realized in your lifetime?"

"That is as God wills. If not in my own life——"

"In that of your son. Has it not dawned on Your Majesty that your Cause, Jacobitism, and this dream of a free, happy and Catholic England hang on one slender thread, your own life? You must have sons and that soon, and to effect that it would be more discreet to marry. Have you considered this? Or is rumour right when she whispers that you are a woman-hater?"

James flushed, and he looked away from the gaze of those blue eyes that could be so piercing.

"I would *I* were," smiled the Regent. "Vanity of vanity! Weariness of flesh and mind. Rarely, but how rarely, does one achieve a new sensation or experience, an attraction worth response—and you robbed me of such a one last night. Perhaps a shade too much of the vixen, though, for my sophisticated taste."

"Surely nothing of the sneaking fox."

"Rather the lioness, you think? *Ma foi!* Would she not be a good mother for those sons of yours, since she is of your own country and of noble blood?"

"You knew her then?"

"I saw her unmasked, as did Lord Stair."

There was a low knock at the door, and one of the negroes, kneeling, handed a slip of paper to the Duke, who read it and made some rapid signs with his hand to the man, who then disappeared.

"Your Majesty, I am desolated, but our interview must end."

He stood up, suddenly laid a hand on James's arm and whispered:

"Before you go, tell me how you learnt of the cellar in the Rue d'Auvergne."

"That I cannot tell you. But what I know I reveal to none."

"I have your promise? In return you shall have my answer."

James nodded, and drew back a step so that the hand slipped from his arm, while the Duke spoke rapidly.

"In a few weeks' time, less perhaps, the Elector goes to Hanover. The Abbé Dubois will meet him secretly at the Hague to arrange the terms of a Triple Alliance between England, Holland and France."

"It is not yet signed."

"It will be before the year is out."

"And I?"

"Will be forced to withdraw beyond the Alps."

"Why do you tell me this?"

The Duke shrugged.

"Who knows? I admire your courage, I envy your faith and enthusiasm, I am anxious to see how you take this *coup-de-grâce* of all your hopes."

James stood quite still, white to the lips, his left hand clenched on the hilt of his rapier, his mask dangling by its ribbon from his right hand. Then he took his hat and bowed.

"*Au revoir, Monseigneur.* But no, it is *adieu.*"

The Duke held open the door, and in his eyes James saw the darkness of unutterable weariness and despair.

"I will pray for you," he said, turning to go out.

The Duke caught his arm sharply.

"Your mask," he whispered; "on your life, mask before you go."

James obeyed, then, as he passed through the long anteroom, a man rose from a chair and came towards the door of the Regent's room—Lord Stair, dressed in a dark green coat, with the blue ribbon of the Garter and the green ribbon of the Thistle at his breast. He gave a little bow as he passed, then the door closed behind him, and James went out into the sunshine of early afternoon.

Now, lying awake in the wide wooden bed at the *Grand Monarque,* with Minette at his feet, he wondered why the Regent had been so insistent that he should mask. Was it for his own safety or lest Stair should know the identity of the visitor who had preceded him?

Stunned as he had felt by the death-blow of all his hopes, he remembered the glance that had passed between him and Stair—one of those glances which hold a lifetime of love or hate, a world of friendship or despair. In Stair's eyes, as in the Duke of Orleans', he had seen something which, like the cellar in the rue d'Auvergne, had filled him with loathing and horror, a glimpse of the unutterable darkness "where their fires are not quenched."

2

James was awakened by a low angry snarl from Minette as she leapt from the bed, and a scream of fright and pain. It was pitch dark, and he could do nothing but grip his dagger and wait, crouched by the bed-post listening to the sound of a struggle. He dared not strike for fear of stabbing Minette; there was a scuffle of bare feet, a scraping noise as a panel in the wall slipped back into place, then silence but for the greyhound's low growling. At last James found flint and tinder, and lit the candle. Minette stopped growling, came jumping towards him and put her forepaws on his shoulders. He laid his cheek against her satin head.

"Thanks for my life, Minette. But for thee I should by now have been stabbed to death in bed. *Ma foi!* The man swore in Scotch as he got away from thee, but he won't win Stair's reward this time."

There was a track of blood across the floor to a recess by the fireplace, but, try as he would, James could not find the secret panel. It was cold, with the eerie chill

that precedes the dawn, and James, putting on coat, boots and cloak, sat down with drawn sword on his knee to wait the light and François' coming. Then a thought struck him; it was strange that Piero in the next room should have heard nothing, should not have come in—unthinkable that he should have heard and not come in. And suddenly the memory of his own bitter words came before him as if scorched in letters of flame. If Piero had angered him, he also had given Piero just cause to be angry with him. He knew that his own nerves had been on edge, that his self-control, strung to breaking-point by his experience in the rue d'Auvergne and his interview with Orleans, had been snapped by the apparently ridiculous quarrel between his dearest friend and one of his most valued adherents. He stood up to go in to Piero and apologize. Already the uncurtained window showed pale with dawn and as he unlocked the door François came along the passage.

"See first if the Prince needs you," said James, and crossing to the window looked out into the misty rain.

François ran in.

"The Prince is not there, Sire, nor his things. His bed has not been slept in. What can have happened?"

"Go down and see if his mare is in the stable."

In a few moments François returned, breathless and alarmed.

"Sancho and my grey are there, Sire, but Roxane has gone."

"Bring round the horses at once when they are saddled, for if possible I wish to do the forty miles to Montargis to-day."

"But, Your Majesty, the Prince——" began the valet; then one glance silenced him and he left the room.

All day the rain fell, steadily and quietly, while James and François rode south, through the Forest of Fontaine-

bleau, past the great chateau of Francis I, along the winding river bank till they rode into Montargis at dusk and dismounted, stiff and wet and cold, at the *Toison d'Or.*

James, who had scarcely spoken all day, gave a curt order that supper should be brought to his room, and while waiting stood before the newly lit wood-fire warming frozen feet and hands while the damp steamed from his soaking coat.

François exclaimed in horror as he came in with the saddle-bags and threw them on the bed.

"*Mon dieu,* Sire! You are drenched and will be ill if you do not change at once."

James sank into a chair and let François pull off his mud-spattered boots and wet coat and then wrap him in a gown of crimson velvet. He was numb in body, mind and spirit, and felt as if nothing could hurt him any more.

There was a conversation at the door, then François brought in the supper and set it on the table at the King's elbow.

"Not too well cooked and badly enough served," he murmured: "*Soupe maigre, deux petits perdrix rôtis avec céleri, un p'tit bout de choufleur, et une grosse bouteille de vin de pays.*"

"You will drink the soup while it is hot, Sire," he said from the door; "when you are in bed I will bring you some mulled wine hot, but very hot!"

James nodded, but did not move. He sat staring into the fire till roused by Minette's paw on his knee.

"*Tiens, ma mie!* The soup is nearly cold now; thou shalt have it."

He put down the soup and she began to lap eagerly, but before the bowl was half empty she stopped suddenly, stiffened, fell over at his feet and began to writhe in agony. He knelt beside her, tried to pour some wine

between her teeth, but she was past swallowing. Then for an instant she was quiet; her great brown eyes looked up at him, full of pathetic and bewildered reproach; a little shiver went through her, and she was still.

James laid the dead head down gently and hid his face in his hands. He felt that this was the last misfortune that could befall him; he could bear no more. He cared nothing that his life had been saved, almost by a miracle. In that darkest hour he knew that there are times when the martyrdom of death is a swift and easy thing compared with the long drawn out agony of life.

There was a knock at the door, and James lifted a face so white and stricken that François ran to him in terror, then looked down and saw Minette dead.

"Grand Dieu!" he cried. "What has happened?"

James pointed to the overturned bowl on the floor.

"I gave her my soup. Minette has saved my life for the second—and last—time. It seems Lord Stair is well served."

His voice broke and he bit his lower lip fiercely.

"You have touched no food, Sire? Thank God!" said François, seizing the rest of the food and flinging it at the back of the fire: "I will go out and get you something to eat in the town. But no, I dare not leave you."

"Some bread and wine; anything will do."

"My own supper, if Your Majesty will allow. I will taste it first, though no one is likely to try and poison me."

James ate a slice of black bread and drank a cup of rough wine in silence, then François spoke:

"Your Majesty must not sleep alone. I will lie across the door if you will allow me."

"It is not necessary."

"Pardon, Sire, but I will not leave you. Who knows what further attempt they might make? You told me that, but for Minette last night, you would not be alive."

"Nor to-night. Give me my rapier; I shall be safe for half an hour while you have your supper and see to the horses. Then I will go to bed, and you can sleep in the chair by the fire if you insist."

The King was left alone before the fire, his drawn sword on the table beside him, the dead greyhound at his feet. He sat still, his head against the high carved back of the wooden chair, his long white hands on the arms, his eyes great pools of shadow in his pale face.

Despair overwhelmed him. The failure of his desperate attempt to gain the Regent's support—the knowledge of the projected treaty between France and England, the Spanish negotiations, which had shown but too clearly that Alberoni regarded himself and the Jacobite Cause only as pawns in a game of intrigue, which embraced Europe from Russia to Spain, Sweden to Turkey and Sicily. Truly, as he had written from Avignon:

"Everything is in an uncertainty everywhere. It is useless to entertain oneself with sad reflections and distant hopes."

Hopes so distant, indeed, that they had vanished beyond the far horizon as a rainbow fades before oncoming night.

"You will know how to distinguish true friends," the letter had ended. "They are rarer than ever."

Words only too prophetic. He thought of Margaret Ogilvie, who had ridden so bravely alone through the night to save him, then had turned on him in his hour of failure, and whom he had found but yesterday in the arms of a man so corrupt and evil that his own flesh had crept at his touch. He thought of Piero—Piero, who, ever since he could remember, had been to him his other self, a self more adventurous, eager, brilliant, youthful, with a gay courage and self-assurance undimmed by the melancholy of his own character and the adverse fortune of his own fated race. Now Piero had left him.

Was it not partly his own fault, the sudden snapping of his own control, which so rarely failed him?

He knew his own aloof temperament, the almost impenetrable barrier of reserve which hedged him from casual friendships and easy intimacies. In his nearly twenty-eight years of life none had penetrated into the citadel of his heart but his mother, his sister and Piero. His sister was dead; he knew that he would not see his mother again on earth, and Piero had gone.

He remembered the dawn in the palace at Scoon, when he had fancied that the blackest hour had come, how Minette had kissed his hand and he had said to her: "Thou alone art left." Now even she lay cold and stiff beside him. He had said then to Père de St. Etienne: "My burden is greater than I can bear"; and the Jesuit had answered in the words wrung from Christ by the Agony in the Garden.

Again James hid his face in his hands.

"Lord, if it be possible," he whispered. "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

Then, as he sat there motionless he saw again the words his exiled father had written—words stained by his widowed mother's tears:

"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."

Without the cross, no crown; without blood and suffering, no victory. One thing, and one alone, was needful, the absolute and unquestioning resignation of the human will to the Divine Will, till the natural man was transfigured by the supernatural, and the soul, emptied of itself, was filled by God.

He experienced one of those rare moments when mortal images fade, when time and space are transcended by eternity and the infinite, and the soul is granted a faint foreshadowing of the Beatific Vision in Heaven, when

it shall see God "no longer as in a glass darkly, but then face to face."

There was a gentle knock at the door, and James, lifting his head, called to François to come in. The fire was burning low, and its uncertain flicker was the only light in the room. The door was closed quietly, then as no word was spoken James's hand flew to his sword and he stood up, his back to the fire, the drawn blade glittering in his hand. There was a movement towards him and he called sharply:

"Another step at your peril!"

"It is I, Sire," came Piero's voice; then, as the sword fell clattering to the ground, he caught the King's hand and held it to his lips.

"Forgive me, *Jacopo mio,* forgive me!"

The King felt his hand wet.

"Tears, Piero?" he said. "You, whom I have never known to weep?"

"Have I not reason?"

Then Piero stumbled against the greyhound's body.

"*Madre di Dio!* Minette dead. What has happened?"

"I gave her the soup that was sent up for my supper."

"Poisoned?"

"Yes. If she had not drunk it instead of me I should now be lying where she is. And last night but for her I should have been stabbed in my sleep."

James picked up the scarlet cloak and flung it over her.

"Only a dog," he said; "but faithful unto death."

"And I——" began Piero; then he put his elbow on the stone arch over the fire and hid his face in his hands. "I must tell you. Will you listen?"

In quick broken words he told how he had insulted Margaret in revenge for her treatment of James at Montrose.

"Your anger, your bitter words, your silence, your door

locked against me, I could not bear it. I stole out, saddled Roxane and rode to Fontainebleau."

"It is on the road to Modena."

"You believed that I should desert you?"

"Are you but now arrived? And met none on the road?"

"None of note. Yes, one outside the town. He wore a cloak of grey, rode a black horse with one white stocking; his left hand was bandaged and he rode like the devil."

"You did not hear him speak?"

"His beast shied, for we came on him suddenly round a corner, and he swore, I think, in Scotch."

"Alan Fraser," said James quietly. "He must have followed me here from Melun."

"Fool that I was not to have remembered that horse and cloak, the fight on the Perth road! I'll be after him, and this time I swear 'tis not *I* that will be left for dead!"

He was already at the door when James spoke.

"*Cui bono?* Let him go. Stair is scarce likely to attempt my life a third time on this journey, for he'll think he has succeeded."

"If I could crush that devil's life out with my bare hands—steel is too easy a death for him—I should die happy."

James looked sadly at Piero.

"Hatred and murder in the heart are scarcely the dispositions for a happy death."

"Do you not understand that my hatred for Stair and for Mistress Ogilvie springs from my love for you?"

"How can true love generate hate? If perfect love casteth out fear, how much more should it render hatred impossible."

"Is any human love perfect?"

"I think not. Perfection must satisfy the whole man,

body, mind and soul, and no human soul can ever really know another."

"So you think that every man must go unsatisfied, travel alone?"

"I think that no human comradeship can ever penetrate the inmost sanctuary of the soul."

There was a long silence which Piero broke.

"Would you have said that to me before yesterday?"

"If you had asked me. I think that in me, as in my father, is some strange reserve, some aloof remoteness of temperament which keeps us lonely to the end."

"Am I then nothing, is my love and all our friendship nothing to you?"

James laid his hands on Piero's shoulders and drew him down till he knelt and their eyes met.

"I spoke of the soul, *carissimo*, not of the heart. Ours is the greatest human love I have ever known, or, I think, shall ever know. Is not that enough?"

CHAPTER VIII

FRIEND AND FOE

At last Marie, the pretty little maid provided by Clarice, had bidden her good-night, and Margaret was alone.

"Mademoiselle should of a surety sleep well," Marie had smiled; "for with the masked ball last night was for her completely *une nuit blanche.*"

But, as she slipped a loose flowered chintz gown over the lawn and lace nightdress which had replaced the old homespun linen, Margaret looked with disgust at the huge carved bed, with its heavy curtains closely drawn except for the space left for her to climb in. The same curtains covered the high windows, and drawing one back, she threw up the sash—still a novelty after the old leaden casements at Dundee and Glenisla.

As the long May twilight slowly gave way to night a few sleepy notes sounded from the last waking bird; the clatter of a horse's hoofs, a man's voice humming a snatch of: *"Malbrouck s'en va-t'en guerre!"* died away, and silence fell. But this sweet and brooding peace, this dreamless sleep of nature, brought neither peace nor stillness to the girl who leant out into the warm, scented air.

The surging currents of the last twenty-four hours had battered and tossed before flinging her into this backwater. She had as yet had no time to sort the varied happenings, still less to analyse their effect on herself. She remembered her excitement at the blaze and glitter

of the Palais Royal, her enjoyment of the incense Jules and Mercury had burned before her beauty, then that sudden plunge into fear and horror when she had found herself in the Regent's arms. Even now she shuddered at the memory. She knew how narrow had been her escape, and behind the mere lust of the flesh she had instinctively felt the presence of something deeper and darker. Then the intervention which had saved her, her duel of wits with Stair, and a triumph owed largely to Captain Hunter's generous and unquestioning support. And, having lingered like a gourmet over the *hors d'oeuvres,* she came to those moments in the dawn and re-lived every one of them. She shut her eyes, felt again those burning kisses on hair and eyes and throat, that long kiss which had seemed to fuse body and mind, heart and soul in one immortal flame of passion.

In a lilac tree below her a nightingale began to sing, uncertainly at first, with a single note or two, then bursting into full song, filling the dim, sweet night with a passion so strong that it sounded as if the small brown bird must be torn and rent with it till naught was left but a crumpled heap of lifeless feathers.

And the girl's breast throbbed in answer, her southern blood, her newly awakened senses aflame with a fierce desire which swept all else before it. Every fibre of her cried out in longing; she felt the beating of her heart, the fierce surge of hot young blood, unbearable; stood up and flung white arms to the darkness. Spring, warm scented night, the nightingale's song—the stage was set and she waiting; she could scarce believe that her lover would not come in answer.

There was a rustling among the bushes; the new-risen moon shone through the leaves of a plane-tree on her as she leant out, her face dimly pale amid the cloudy masses of her hair, her two hands to her breast to stay

the tumult of her heart. Below her window she saw a man standing in the shadow; for a long moment there was silence, a breathless silence, while her heart felt as if its beating was stayed for ever, then Jules de Sarci's voice, light and mocking, came up to her.

"How does your Shakespeare say: 'Ah, that I were a glove upon that hand, that I might touch that cheek?' Cruel fate, that thou hast none fitter to play Romeo to thy Juliet than I!"

"I could not sleep."

"And I am but just returned. Come down."

Margaret hesitated. That sublimated moment of passion had been shattered forever by his laughter. They had not met since he had put her and the puzzled Clarice into the coach at the *Nid au Bois,* and she wondered if the quarrel he had forced for her sake was still unhealed. She put on a long cloak, pulled the hood over her head and went down to the garden-gate where he was waiting and whispered to her:

"Come to the summer-house, where we shall not be heard."

"I haven't thanked you," she said.

"Is it necessary? Let us say that any legitimate opportunity of quarrelling with the Prince of Este is more than welcome to me. It is therefore I who am in your debt."

"But you will not fight now?" she asked, as she sat down in the summer-house.

"Not *now,* since the King forbids."

"Why do you hate the Prince so much?"

"I need not ask why you do, Mademoiselle; that jumps to the eye!"

"Because he insulted me? He did that only for the King's sake."

"You forgive him? *Mon dieu!* what saintly virtue!"

"I understand his reason, but that is not necessarily to forgive."

"Any more than to love. One understands because most men and women are so easy to read. Women fancy themselves so subtle, so incomprehensible, but in truth they are of a transparent simplicity."

"Thanks, Monsieur le Marquis."

"*You* have something of the man in you."

"Is that a compliment?"

"From me, most assuredly it is."

"What do you want me to do?"

He laughed.

"You grow cynical. Miladi would say that my evil influence is already making its mark."

"Why do you fancy Aunt Mary does not like you?"

"One must admire her. She has a mind that has neither the mistiness of Scotland nor the English hypocrisy. It is clear, hard, dry, without half lights or mystery, like a winter day when one can see far and travel quickly."

"That is a very good description of her. And yourself?"

"Does that interest you?" he asked drily; "a woman is generally interested in a man only when she thinks he may fall in love with her or has already done so."

"So you think I cannot be interested in you because neither of those two things is true?"

"Mademoiselle, I should not have put it so bluntly. But, since your interest is already bespoken elsewhere——"

Margaret looked at him quickly. She could see his face clearly in the moonlight, and his huge dark eyes seemed to pierce her subterfuges with the sharpness of steel. Her hood had slipped back, and he saw the colour rise in her face before she spoke.

"You told me to-day that there was something I cared about more than myself, and I answered, the Cause and the King."

"To-day? Nay, that was yesterday."

He pointed to the east, which was paling with dawn below the waning moon.

"And you too care for something more than yourself," she said softly.

"Yes," he said with a little laugh; "for power—the power to make others dance like puppets to my will, to hold life and death, love and hate, in the palm of my hand, to intrigue and plan and scheme, to move men and women, even circumstances and events like knights and queens, bishops and castles in a game of chess."

"The game you play for the King?"

"Which King? For there are two."

"My King," she answered; "the rightful King, for whom I am willing to give all my love and service."

"All?"

"All," she said proudly; "since my fathers fought and bled for his, since my father lies in an exile's grave for his father's sake, shall I not be ready to lay life, loyalty, my heart itself at his feet?"

He gripped her wrist in his thin, fevered hand.

"Words," he said. "Women are ever generous of such! But I ask more—deeds, courage, resource, but most of all unquestioning obedience to my will and plans."

"I shall not willingly fail you."

"How if you were asked to suffer danger, scandal, doubt?"

"Is that all?"

He dropped his voice.

"If you were asked to sacrifice other loyalties to this

great one, perhaps to sacrifice yourself, your love, your heart itself?"

Still that burning grip was on her wrist, those burning eyes on hers, and a little shiver of fear crept through her, but she answered steadily:

"Please God I will never fail in the King's service, which to me is the greatest service of all."

He let go her wrist and put his hand to his side; in the growing light his face looked ghastly.

"You are ill," she cried; "you will kill yourself for the King."

"No, I am more useful alive," he answered with his crooked smile; "I shall not die while something still remains for me to do."

"How can I help you? Surely the King is no longer in Paris, in such deadly peril?"

"No, he is well away on the road to Avignon. But peril will never stay him when he has set his mind on a thing. He has all the Stuart obstinacy. But I am expecting news and papers from England which must go on to him without delay when they arrive."

"Good news?"

"And bad. The Jacobite feeling runs so strongly now after the brutal executions that the Whigs dare not risk an election, so have substituted seven years instead of three for a Parliament duration."

"That is bad, for it gives them another four years in power to crush our hopes."

"Yet good, for it shows the Elector and his Government in their true colours. The Bishop of Rochester but a few days since bade the House of Lords admire the happiness of the free English nation under the heel of a self-appointed Parliament and a standing army of mercenaries. The papers I expect contain names and figures of the utmost importance to be known to none in Paris but myself."

"And surely," murmured Margaret sweetly, "to the nymphs of the *Nid au Bois,* to Mademoiselle de Chausseraye, Mistress Trant, the Marquise de Mézières, the Oglethorpes, and the rest?"

He laughed again as he stood up.

"A little feminine jealousy makes you wholly irresistible, Mademoiselle. But it will soon be daylight, and you must be in before then, lest any spy on our impassioned meeting."

"But you've not told me what you'd have me do."

"Time enough when the time is come to do it. And I know you will not fail me when I ask."

"To seal the bargain," she said, holding out her hand.

He took it, but did not raise it to his lips, and so for a moment they stood in the misty dawn, hand in hand, eye to eye.

2

Time hung heavy on Margaret's hands for the next few days. Drives in the Bois, shopping expeditions with her aunt, strolls with Clarice in the garden, books, music, cards, embroidery,—all had lost their zest. Paris, the new-built city of the *Grand Monarque,* with its wide spaces and splendid palaces so strangely mingling with the crowded houses and narrow winding streets of the mediæval town, seemed a dreary desert; the south, Provence and Avignon, were the land of promise and desire. Day after day a pitiless rain fell, drenching the lilac, strewing grass and paths with the red and gold petals of the tulips, turning the streets into torrents of water and sloughs of mud.

One late afternoon Margaret sat at the window of her room, looking out into the rain, her hands idle on her knees. She had not again seen Jules, knew nothing of the King, why he had been in Paris, nor if he had reached

Avignon, and she began to wonder. Why had he left without word or sign? Since she had seen his diamond signet on Piero's finger in the dawn she had never doubted that it was the King. But now she asked herself was he like so many of his race—light come, light gone, blown by the wind of passion from desire to desire? She could not believe it. When she remembered those lips on hers, the beating of that wild heart against hers, she knew that passion had leapt to meet passion as fire flames from spark.

He had gone. Had the Prince of Este gone too? The anger against him, which she had striven to hide from Jules, burnt steadily, and now its flame was fanned by jealousy. She remembered at Gorntully how James's eyes and Piero's had met, leaving her cold and lonely. She remembered too Jules' contemptuous words about women. Was it always so that men regarded them, as playthings of passion or pawns in a game of intrigue, while for the communion of mind with mind, heart with heart, it was to men they turned?

Marie came in eagerly.

"Miladi asks me to say that she has ordered the coach for the reception at the Swedish embassy in an hour's time, and will Mademoiselle put on the green and silver dress?"

There was quite a stir among the guests of Baron de Spaar as Lady Mary Gordon and her niece entered the great hall where the ambassador was receiving. The old lady, stately and erect, wore over her underskirt of crimson brocade a lace apron and an overdress of purple satin, the long stomacher almost covered with bows of blue ribbon matching the huge sapphires on her fur cuffs and the purple hood which covered her grey hair behind the upstanding lace fontanges. Margaret wore her hair

dressed high, and falling in heavy curls on each shoulder. Her dress of emerald satin edged with ermine was looped back by diamond clasps from the stiff petticoat of cloth of silver, also edged by a wide vandyked flounce of ermine. Long emerald ear-rings and the necklace of great square emeralds, which had been her mother's, enhanced the dazzling whiteness of neck and breast, while two black velvet patches, one on brow, one on cheek, accentuated the arch of black brows over the shining grey-hazel eyes. Conscious of her own beauty and of the murmur of admiration which had greeted her appearance, Margaret found herself able to meet without faltering the quizzical glance of Captain Hunter's blue eyes as he bowed over her hand.

"'Tis vastly hot in here," he murmured. "Shall we take a turn in the garden?"

Margaret laid her hand lightly on the cuff of his silver-laced coat of black satin, opening over a long waistcoat of purple.

"I am in your debt, sir," she said as they went out; "and shall be glad to repay you in thanks, or, if you prefer it, in explanations."

"Faith, I'll take them on trust. But if I might venture a guess in the dark, I'd be prepared to lay long odds 'twas Jacobitism, not love, I was called in to help."

She laughed as they sat down in an orangery, where they could see the flash and movement of dancing crowds through the open door.

"You would win your stakes, Captain Hunter; and since you are no Jacobite, perhaps 'tis better to your liking you should know no more. Forgive me for having so implicated you."

"'Twas nothing to me. As I told you in Scotland,

Mistress, I care not if French Jamie or German Georgie sit on the English throne; and many others of my kidney care no more than I."

"But surely a man must be Jacobite or Hanoverian?"

"A woman will be, if she thinks at all, but for me I care naught so I be free to go my own way, live my own life and be subject to no foreign tyranny, whether of Germany, Spain or France."

"Is that all your ideal?"

He looked at her again with that little smile which, like his slow English voice, seemed to her to hold a touch of amused contempt.

"'Tis an ideal that was in England before Norman William came, or Roman Cæsar, belike, and will still be there when German George and all his kin are forgotten dust. 'Tis this; to till the earth, to love the land, to leave good soil where you found bad, fine trees and woods where was bare heath, to live decently under the good red roof that was your father's, and his before him, to see your flocks and herds increase, your men and women and their children well-housed, well-fed, well-paid for service, to hunt and ride, shoot and fish, to dance, to win or lose a guinea or two at cards, to rub off the rust sometimes by a visit to London, a theatre, a rout, the Court, the coffee-houses, and at the end of it six foot of good Hertfordshire earth in the shadow of the old church with its square Norman tower."

"You are like my uncle," Margaret said slowly; "'the love of a man for his own land,' he said, 'the land your fathers have ploughed and sown and reaped, hunted and shot over for hundreds of years.'"

"And where you hope your sons will carry on when you are gone."

There was silence while his blue eyes, serious for once under their straight brows, swept down her, from the

scented darkness of her hair over white breast and slim waist to the silver shoes that gleamed under the ermine hem of her skirt. She was conscious of his gaze; knew, in a flash of insight, that he admired and approved her as he would do a brood mare which he contemplated buying to improve the strain of his hunters or his shire horses. She spoke on impulse.

"I fancied the other day that I had divided men into those who look on women as the playthings of an hour and those who regard them as pawns in a game."

"But you forgot the most important thing of all," he drawled, amused once more.

"So it seems. And yet I wonder——."

Another voice broke in.

"I should rather have fancied Mistress Ogilvie left others wondering than did so herself."

Captain Hunter rose and bowed. Margaret, gripping herself, rose too, and swept a deep curtsey before Lord Stair; then drew herself to her full height and met his gaze fearlessly. He took out his snuff-box and handed it to Captain Hunter.

"We parted in this charming company and are fated to meet again in it. I am vastly distressed to have again to interrupt a *tête-â-tête,* Cousin, but your aunt desires your presence. Captain Hunter, your servant."

The Englishman strolled back to the house, and Margaret would have followed when Stair spoke.

"Why such haste? Cousin Mary is but now sat down to cards."

"You said, my lord, that she desired my presence."

"All must desire it. Captain Hunter aims high."

"How so?"

"He's in the mode, since his taste approves the Pretender's and the Regent's. I vow I endorse their verdict —vastly engaging."

His cold eyes appraised her as Hunter's had done, but under this glance her flesh crept. He laughed as she drew away from him.

"Fear not, pretty cousin. Your honour is as safe with me as it would be *now* with the Pretender."

"As it would be *now?*"

There was a note of fear in her voice, for his words seemed to hold a menace.

"Was it not always so?" he mocked; "methinks this French-bred princeling is strangely proof against women's wiles. Strange indeed, for his mother is of the south and his father was a fool-slave of lust."

Again Margaret made to go, but he stayed her with a hand on her arm.

"Bargain for bargain, fair coz," he smiled; "you're curious, being a woman, I because 'tis my business as a diplomat. Tell me how the Pretender escaped that night and why he was in Paris."

"And in return?"

"Would you not know why even your beauty can no longer stir his cold blood?"

There was something in his tone, in the curl of his thin lips, the devilish cruelty in his eyes, that made her own blood run cold.

"The *King,*" she answered slowly, "escaped because warned of your coming."

"And your woman's wit delayed me. Therefore I am in your debt, and shall not forget it."

"How he escaped I know not, nor why he was in Paris, nor at the ball."

"I can tell you that. He was at the ball for you. You were my decoy."

"You lie."

"Unknowingly. Since he, who scarce notices a woman, had been seen to be interested in you in Scotland, I took

good care, knowing he was in Paris, or soon would be, that he should know you were to be at the *bal masqué* and in what dress. The bait took."

"But the bird was not snared."

"Not then."

She clasped her hands so quickly to hide their trembling that her silver fan fell to the ground. He stooped and handed it to her.

"But *now*," he repeated, "would you not know of *now?*"

"The King is away," she said, but more to reassure herself than because she now believed it; "he rode that very day, and by now is far."

"Aye, farther than you dream."

"What mean you? Speak and let me know the worst!"

"I mean, little cousin, that he is dead—as shall be all who cross my path or strive to defeat my plans. Be warned. 'Twere shame for such fair white flesh as yours to lie rotting in corruption because you had dared to set your will against mine."

He moved away a few steps, then came back, a cold white passion in his shadowed eyes and pale face.

"So perish all the enemies of King George, and mine," he said; "even as the last scion of that thrice-damned house has gone down into hell, and left none to mourn him save a few poor fools."

Margaret put her hand to the fluted column at the side of the door. It seemed to sway to and fro like a reed; the tall figure of Stair as he re-entered the Embassy, the high windows, the gay crowd seen through them, were all unstable as drapery blown by the wind, then blackness blotted them out.

Margaret opened her eyes to find her head resting on Jules de Sarci's shoulder, and his face, which had been looking down at her very seriously, curled into its usual mocking smile. She sat up, instinctively her hands went to

her hair, then she remembered and turned to him a face of horror.

"The King——" she gasped. "The King——"

"Let his lordship continue to believe him dead till he learns better."

"Then he is still alive?"

"Twice he escaped. But I fancy that the agent who arranged the poisoning and reported it as an accomplished fact will have a bad quarter of an hour with Stair. Then he told you the King was dead? And that was why you fainted?"

"I have never fainted before; it was foolish," she murmured, shamefaced.

He drew out a lace handkerchief and dusted the shoulder of his coat of gold patterned with green pomegranates.

"Chère Mademoiselle," he mocked, "next time you do me the supreme honour of laying your head upon my shoulder, let me beg of you to choose a coat from which it is easier to remove the traces of such intimacy. Also, next time you faint, it would perhaps be wiser to choose a cavalier who is more capable of supporting you than my miserable arm."

He shook out his lace ruffles and readjusted the narrow black velvet ribbon which bound them at the wrist, then held out a thin hand laden with rings.

"Mademoiselle will do me the intoxicating pleasure of dancing with me the next gavotte?"

She swept a curtsey, a smile dimpling the cheek which had regained its colour, then, when they were in the open, with the light full on his face, patched like her own, he whispered hurriedly:

"If Lady Mary can be persuaded to start south within the next three days——"

"You wish me to try?"

"The papers are due from England to-morrow, and must go on without delay by a safe hand."

"Mine?"

He checked a few yards from the windows in the open where he could not be overheard and took her fan as if to admire the painting.

"Lady Mary is so firm a Whig none can suspect her, and you will be safe with her. Stair knows she is going to Vaucluse and has given her her papers."

"He knows me for a Jacobite."

"But thinks the King dead. If we could get you away before he learns the truth—— But charming, Mademoiselle, these little scenes of pastoral are surely painted by Watteau himself."

Margaret entered the hall and trod the dance with Jules, her eyes like stars, her heart beating in time to the music its song of hope—south to adventure, triumph and perhaps to love!

CHAPTER IX

THE SEALED PACKET

Lady Mary was busy reading letters as Margaret came into her room on their last evening in Paris.

"Lord Stair has sent round my packet, which came by the Embassy courier," said the old lady. "There is one letter for you."

Margaret opened it languidly. Already the familiar life in Dundee was dim as a half-forgotten dream, the people in it scarcely more substantial than wavering shadows on the wall. There were two sheets covered by Elsie's round, childish hand, dated about a fortnight after the travellers had left Scotland.

"My dearest Meg," Elsie wrote in incoherent ecstasy, "the most wonderful thing in the world has happened to me. You will never guess! If it had been you, Meg, so beautiful and self-possessed, I could have understood it, but I can still hardly believe that it is me he cares for! He is so handsome and so clever and will assuredly do great things in the world. There was never anyone like him. I could cry for joy! Father is so pleased."

Margaret looked through a second page of rapture and then turned to the last sheet.

"He only told me ten days ago, though I thought before you left that he did love me. He left three days since on very urgent business. He would tell me no more, nor whither he went, but I think it was to London or Paris, so if you see him in Paris, Meg, tell him I shall not live unless he returns to me soon!"

Margaret laughed and Lady Mary smiled as she folded up the last of her numerous letters.

"Good news from home, lassie?"

"Is it home, Aunt Mary? It feels now that being with you is home."

"You're learning something of the world anyhow, which is better for you than to see nothing but the walls of Dundee and the hills of Glenisla."

Lady Mary chuckled drily as she finished Elsie's transports.

"Little fool! She never even tells us the man's name."

"Alan Fraser, I expect."

"You evidently don't like him from the set of your mouth. What's wrong with the man? and who is he?"

"One of the StrathErrick Frasers, a distant kinsman of Lord Lovat."

"None the better for that, the old fox! But why don't you like him?"

Then, as Margaret hesitated, the old lady laughed again.

"Like myself, Jock Stair and a good few other sensible bodies, he's on the wrong side, I suppose? And none the worse for that. Well, 'tis too late for you to find and convert him, if he's in Paris, as we start south early to-morrow. I expect that is Clarice. She said she would come in this evening to bid us good-bye."

Margaret ran to the door and put an arm round Clarice, who was in a dress of palest rose and misty blue, embroidered with silver.

"You look like a dewy rose, *chérie,*" Margaret said. "So lovely that one hardly dares to embrace you!"

Lady Mary put up her lorgnette.

"A very pretty picture, the two of you. Men are even bigger fools than I thought them."

Clarice took the wrinkled hand with its heavy rings and kissed it.

"Do you not yet realise, *ma cousine,* that for me Jules is the only man in the world? While we have each other I am completely satisfied. I ask for nothing else."

Lady Mary took up her pack of cards and shuffled them.

"Such ideal relations are rare," she said drily; "too rarefied in fact for most women, almost as exalted as Meg's Stuart loyalty. My dear, it is very good of you to waste an evening playing cards with an old woman. Meg, why didn't Jock Forbes teach you something useful, like ombre or basset, instead of filling your head with history and politics? Make up the fire, for it's gey cold, and my old bones are getting stiff with the damp. Ask Jean to bring in the candles."

Margaret took her embroidery to the window, while Lady Mary dealt the cards, and as she threaded her needle with rosy silk she wondered what Alan Fraser was doing. If he were indeed in Paris it meant fresh danger for the King, and another ardent servant for Stair. Then she wondered about Jules de Sarci, who appeared and disappeared so fitfully. He had driven home from the Swedish Embassy with her aunt and herself, and by the time the lumbering Scotch coach had reached the de Sarci hotel, Lady Mary had announced her intention of leaving for her chateau near Vaucluse in three days' time —a decision which she was quite unaware had been diplomatically suggested to her by Jules. Since then Margaret had neither seen nor heard of him, and knew no more of the expected papers, if she was to be entrusted with them or not. Had Alan Fraser come to try and intercept them? If so, had he succeeded? Had Stair heard of the King's escape and did Jules in that case consider the moment inopportune to try and evade his ceaseless and ubiquitous vigilance?

The words of her kinsman's lament returned per-

sistently to her mind; she almost fancied that she heard a ghostly echo of Piero's violin throbbing with the cry of despair:

"Now a' is done that men can do,
And a' is done in vain!"

She shook herself angrily and looked across to the card-table. The candlelight warmed Clarice's cheek to a delicate flush and made a shining aureole of her golden hair. It silhouetted Lady Mary's aquiline nose, large well-cut mouth, and grey hair against the rich purple of her silk hood.

"The King falls!" she exclaimed in triumph.

"He was no good," answered Clarice as she picked up the cards, shuffled and dealt again; "he was unsupported."

"Yes, that knave was more harm than good. If he had had a Queen behind him——Ah, that is better!"

The casual chatter took on a deeper meaning. The King had indeed been insufficiently supported, many of his followers more harm than good to his Cause. "If he had had a Queen behind him——" The world knew all that his mother had been and done for him, but had not Lady Mary, a shrewd judge of men and women, just said that ideal relations were too rarefied for the common lot of humanity? Margaret knew that for her all the years of life had been transfigured by such an ideal—the ideal of selfless and generous devotion to the exiled King, who stood for all that her people and her race deemed best and dearest. Only a few days ago she had proudly told Jules that for the Cause she was ready to give all, but she knew in her inmost heart that the Cause no longer came first, but a man—that love was stronger than loyalty.

The door opened to admit Jules, even more exquisite than usual, in a coat of pale lavender brocade, its silver cuffs matching the silver waistcoat and both embroidered with diamonds. He lifted Lady Mary's hand with an extravagant compliment, stood behind his sister, who put up her hand to touch his on her shoulder.

"Even thy coming brings me no luck, *chéri,*" she smiled; "I have lost every game."

"My luck is laggard," he answered. "Give it a chance to catch me up."

Lady Mary looked at the clock.

"One more hand," she said; "and then to bed to prepare for our early start."

Presently Jules strolled over to Margaret.

"Mademoiselle, you are cruel to those beautiful eyes to do such fine work in the twilight. What a lovely rose."

He sat down beside her on the window-seat and held up the soft white satin.

"It is a stomacher I am embroidering for Clarice."

"The papers," he whispered. "The messenger was killed, but I saved the packet. Into no hands but the King's. Guard them as your life and honour. If you see Stair, know nothing and play him fair. Surely, Mademoiselle, that should be golden; only in the bud, unopened, unawakened, is the heart hidden."

He handed back her embroidery, and she felt under the satin a small, hard square, which she slipped quickly into the breast of her gown while Jules returned to the card-table.

Lady Mary smiled rather grimly at him as she gathered up the cards and put them into their mother-of-pearl box.

"Your luck has certainly caught you up," she said. "At least you have given it to Clarice."

"We share everything."

"Even secrets?"

"The essence of true love, Miladi, is secrecy and silence. That is why I am totally incapable of expressing my desolation at your departure and Mademoiselle's."

"Shall you stay in Avignon?" asked Clarice.

"Emphatically not! Since 'tis full to bursting with the Jacobite Court, and prices will be soaring."

"Surely not to suit the pockets of the poor exiles?"

"No," snorted Lady Mary; "but to extract from the pockets of them that pay the prices of the goods which these poor exiles cannot pay for."

Jules laughed.

"You will turn off at Orange then? We may meet later, for if this weather does not improve I am thinking of bringing Clarice south in search of some sun."

2

Travelling by easy stages, the travellers reached Fontainebleau early in the afternoon of the second day, and Lady Mary sent out Margaret, with Marie and old Ian, to see something of the famous forest and chateau.

The sun had just broken through the clouds, and every leaf was hung with sparkling crystals from the rain which had fallen in the morning. Marie, who, in her eighteen years, had hardly been outside the walls of Paris, was enthusiastic as a child with a new toy, much to the Scot's amusement. To Margaret there was something awe-inspiring in the long vistas of giant tree-trunks, ordered in rank and soaring upward to their green roof like the splendour of a great Gothic cathedral. There was a breadth, a magnificent dignity of repose which cast a hush upon the restless spirit. She thought of St. Giles's in Edinburgh, but perhaps it was a memory of

childish weariness under interminable prayers and sermons which gave the mental picture something of dry and dusty austerity; it was cold, clean and bare, like a house from which warmth and happiness have gone with the passing of its former inhabitants. Here, indeed, one could fancy the Lord God walking in the cool of the evening and seeing that it was good.

Marie and Ian had fallen a little way behind, and as she turned a corner of the long uphill path Margaret was face to face with the life-sized crucifix which gave the hill its name of *Croix de Calvaire*. She stopped in her tracks as suddenly as if she had been shot. She had been vaguely and unpleasantly conscious of the Deity as a bearded Jehovah dispensing justice in some cold and far-off heaven, a Being wholly awe-inspiring and unlovable. Here in the glory of spring sunshine, under the blue, cloud-flecked sky, looking over the miles of tree-tops which rose and fell like the waves of some green sea, Margaret for the first time in her life saw Christ as a living, suffering Man, saw the Incarnation as the pivot and central point of the world's history, without which the universe and man would have remained untransfigured by the indwelling of God. She stood motionless, looking at the bowed, thorn-crowned Head, the blood-stained, scarred Face, in which peace triumphed over physical agony and dissolution, at the pierced, bleeding Hands and Feet and Side. Then, as the sound of the servants' laughing voices drew near, she turned and ran like a hunted thing into a thicket which hid her from the path.

The sound pursued her, then was hushed; she reached a glade on the further side of the hill and sat down behind a beech-tree. She was acutely conscious of external things, the smooth greyness of the bark against

which her cheek rested, the old roots writhing like a nest of snakes in and out of the rich brown earth, the emerald of the cushioned moss which gleamed through the copper drifts of last year's leaves, purpled here and there by the wet. Overhead the brilliant green of the young leaves was clear as water; but for their murmur, like the sound of a distant sea, the silence was unbroken, but it seemed no longer the Creator who passed through the garden of man's innocence, but the Redeemer, alone under the moonlit olive-trees, who prayed in the mortal Agony of His Humanity.

Margaret suddenly realized that she was alone, and that the sun-rays pierced the boughs in almost level lines. She had reached the thicket on her way back when she heard the jingling of bridles and the sound of men's voices, and hiding behind a bushy may-tree she saw two riders ambling along the glade she had just left. One of the horses put his foot into a crevice between two roots, stumbled and almost unseated his rider, who gave an angry exclamation, while the other reined in his horse, a black, with one white stocking.

Then Margaret drew a quick breath and crouched lower behind her screening bush, for the riders were Lord Stair and Alan Fraser.

"Deuce take it! My girth has gone," said Stair dismounting; "and I vow I'll not walk all the way back to the inn."

"Maybe I can fix it, my lord," said Fraser. "If not, you can take my saddle."

He hitched the black's rein over a bough, and Stair leant against a tree and watched his efforts with a smile.

"Gad, Fraser, you seem a better hand with a strap than with a bowl."

Fraser looked round with a scowl on his heated face.

"My lord, the soup was drunk, for his valet brought out the tray and the bowl was empty. Next time I'll not be satisfied till I've transfixed his dead body."

"Next time? Nay, I give no second chances."

"You will give me another."

"*Will?* Do you command me?"

"Nay, but if your lordship desires the Pretender's death as ardently as I do you will lend me all your power, money and network of spies to carry out my revenge—a revenge that is sacred because I swore to my dying father that naught and none should turn me from it."

Stair paused with a pinch of snuff halfway to his nose and regarded him curiously.

"And such an oath you would hold binding, even were it to your own disadvantage?"

"Binding until death. But there is more—my belief in predestination that the Calvinist religion teaches, that I am one of the few elect unto salvation."

"Faith! A mighty comfortable belief for the *few*."

"And I am the instrument chosen as a sharp sword to carry out the sentence of the Lord of Israel upon the son of Ahab, because he doeth evil and walketh in the way of his father Ahab and his mother Jezebel, worshipping false gods and setting up graven images."

Stair shut his snuff-box with a snap and looked at Fraser's kindled face with a little sneering smile.

"I think perhaps you shall have another chance, Mr. Fraser."

"It matters little," answered Fraser, his blue eyes ablaze with religious exaltation: "The Lord God of Israel has chosen me as His instrument of vengeance, so He will not fail His elect in this good work."

"I'll be charmed to co-operate with Jehovah in this matter, though, since in it our interests seem to lie in the same direction. There's an urgent packet of papers come from England to the Pretender, a letter from Godolphin in the Tower, one from that damned non-juring Bishop of Rochester; others, far more important, containing a detailed plan for a rising in England, with lists of supporters, numbers of men ready to join in each town and hiding places of arms and money."

"My lord, if I may get this packet for you, and then see my hand red in the Popish bastard's blood, I will ask no more."

"What of pretty Mistress Elspeth Forbes?"

"I can then turn my back on politics and fighting, for I shall have accomplished the desire of the Lord, and can find peace and happiness with my wife and children."

"Faith! Let's hope she'll enjoy the caresses of that blood-stained hand of yours. But 'twill soon be twilight. And what of that girth?"

"I think your lordship had better take my saddle, and I'll ride bareback."

"At the inn I'll give you directions before I return to Paris," said Stair as he mounted, and they rode off at a trot.

Margaret rose from her concealment and began to push her way back through the thicket, with fury in her heart against Alan and dismay that, while she had heard so much, there should be so little that was useful. She had learned nothing of Stair's plans—not even if he knew that the messenger with the papers had been killed between Amiens and Abbeville. Surely he must know this, and that Jules de Sarci had recovered the papers, as he knew now that the King had escaped. Would

he then suspect her of carrying these all-important documents?

She heard a rustle in the bushes, and, terrified, ran as fast as she could in the gathering twilight, the briars tangling her hair, her feet catching in roots and twists of honeysuckle. The crashing through the undergrowth passed her and went ahead; then, as she reached the path, she laughed for relief to see a young wild boar lumbering up the hill, as frightened of her as she had been of imaginary pursuers. Round the next corner she almost collided with Marie and Ian in search of her, and felt inclined to hug them as Marie exclaimed in horror at her dishevelled appearance.

Lady Mary went early to bed, but Margaret sat by the window of the little room she was to share with Marie, looking out into the street from the chateau to the road north-west to Chantilly and Paris. She thought of Elsie and wondered if she should be warned. But of what? She herself believed that Alan, warped and distorted as he was by his Calvinist faith and his murderous hate of the wrecker of his father's happiness, loved Elsie with a strong and faithful attachment. More, silence on her part was more likely to be of use in the King's service than unnecessary information given to his enemies. "All lesser loyalties," Jules de Sarci had said, "must, if necessary, be sacrificed to the one great one." And suddenly, at the thought of sacrifice, her mind went back to the Calvary on the hill. She had promised sacrifice, easily, almost casually, without knowing what it meant, but now, against her will she realized that any love means sacrifice, cannot exist without it, and that, blindly, she had bound herself to a renunciation which she could not define nor clearly foresee, and she was afraid.

Then she put away such thoughts, stood up, yawned,

decided to call Marie and go to bed and sleep—one day nearer the south, Avignon and the King. Her attention was caught by the sound of galloping hoofs along the road from Paris; a mud-spattered rider pulled up his foam-flecked horse and dismounted in the circle of light from the open inn door. Margaret went out and met Marie running breathlessly up the stairs.

"Mademoiselle, the one who has just arrived is asking for you; but quickly, quickly, he desires to see you!"

"Me? Are you sure? Who is he?"

"Mademoiselle Ogilvie he wanted, and he comes from Monsieur le Marquis."

A little flutter of fear stirred in Margaret's heart. Was it bad news from the south or only that Jules dared no longer trust her with the papers?

She went down with Marie, and the man, who was draining a goblet of wine, came over to her at the foot of the stairs, handing her a small letter.

"For Mademoiselle, from Monsieur le Marquis. I am to wait for the answer and return immediately with it. It is urgent, but of the most urgent, said Monsieur de Sarci."

"You wear the de Sarci livery, but I do not remember you."

"Possibly Mademoiselle does not remember my face, but she will recollect that I clumsily shut the door of the coach on her dress at the *Nid au Bois* a few days ago when she was leaving with Mademoiselle de Sarci, and Monsieur le Marquis rated me for my awkwardness."

Margaret nodded; dazed after the quarrel between Piero and Jules, she had hardly noticed the little incident at the time, but remembered it now.

"I will read this in my room," she said; "and bring you down the answer."

Marie lit the candles and busied herself about the room while Margaret examined the letter. It was one large sheet of paper, folded envelope-wise, the coronet on the corner almost hidden by the heavy seal clearly imprinted with the de Sarci arms and their numerous quarterings. She took a penknife, opened it, and read the three lines written in the violet ink which she knew Jules affected, because she had heard Lady Mary's sarcastic comments on it.

> "Give the messenger the packet, which I must now entrust to another hand, for S. has discovered its loss and suspects you.—J.
>
> "Haste! Haste! Haste! Every moment lost may mean a life lost."

She moved to the window and stood looking out into the quiet dim street, the tired, steaming horse standing with drooping head in the yellow light. "Every moment lost may mean a life lost." She must get Marie out of the room, so that she could take the papers from their hiding-place.

"Marie, fetch me a drink of milk, then we will take down the answer."

As the door shut behind Marie, Margaret looked again at the paper. She had never seen Jules' writing, but ink, paper and seal were certainly his. She fancied she heard again that low, urgent whisper of command: "Into no hands but the King's." Yet surely, she must obey this latest order, written after knowledge of fresh circumstances?

A few moments later she handed to the man a small

thick packet sealed with the imprint of the carved ivory rose which Jules had given her. She leaned from her window, listening to the sound of galloping hoofs growing fainter and fainter along the road to Paris, with the question still unsolved: Had she done right or wrong?

PART III. AVIGNON

JUNE 10, 1716—MARCH 9, 1717

CHAPTER I

ROSE AND ORANGE

It was a perfect summer day as James and Piero rode through the streets of Avignon on June 10, the heat tempered by a cool breeze from the Alps, and the gardens of the d'Eyssautier palace were thronged by the four or five hundred Jacobite exiles as well as by the local *noblesse* assembled by Monsieur d'Eyssautier in honour of the King's birthday. As James came out into the garden with his host a beautiful sight met his eyes—a long line of cypresses cut black into the sapphire sky on each side of the straight path leading to the river. Orange trees in urns of green bronze stood along the low balustrade of rose marble, the brilliant fruit blazing against the dark background of shining leaves. Roses of every shade from deepest crimson and vivid flame to white and ivory and tall Madonna lilies filled the air with a scent whose languorous sweetness was sharpened by the aromatic pungence of bruised herbs strewed underfoot. Everywhere was colour and movement; in the black shadow of heavy ilexes and the dancing sunlight and shade of poplars and willows along the river banks men and women strolled, talked and laughed, the gay colours of coats and gowns vying with the plumage of the peacocks, which strutted proudly on the path, or the soft sheen of the breast of the doves cooing in their high marble cote.

As the King stood with Madame d'Eyssautier at the top of the flight of steps leading from the house a beautiful girl curtseyed before him, sinking into the

billowing folds of the brocade dress that was the blue and green and gold of the peacocks' tails. She stood erect, almost as tall as he, with a Roman profile whose beauty matched Piero's.

"Since you are the only one in all the company who wears no white rose, Sire, I was bidden to bring you this."

He took the opening bud with a smile and placed it in the Garter star at his breast.

"Mademoiselle Doni, there is none here from whom I would rather accept the symbol of my Cause than from yourself, since your father and his brother, with my host of to-day, have welcomed me here so warmly that almost I forget I am an exile."

As he took Madame d'Eyssautier's hand he smiled at her and Julia Doni with that irresistible Stuart charm which binds till its victims are dead dust, and perhaps after, and flung a laughing glance at Piero.

"Mademoiselle Julie, there's a fellow wears no rose either. I'd have you convert him."

"I had but the one," she smiled at Piero.

"Easy remedied," he laughed: "Mine will be the fresher straight from your hand to my heart."

"A hard one if rumour speaks true."

"A lying jade."

"Then give her the lie."

"Do you dare me?"

They stood in a little square fenced with roses, and in the middle, at the meeting of four paths, a sun-dial. She reached up, but the only white rose grew beyond her stretch.

"I can pick it," said Piero. "But not for nothing. But why should we speak French, you and I? Let us not waste our time in mincing words when the most beautiful language in the world is ours."

"*'Lingua Toscana in bocca Romana,'*" she quoted, smiling back over her shoulder.

He looked down at her. The sunlight poured on her high lace fontanges, on her hair, which shone blue-black through the hood of gold tissue, on the necklace of aquamarines, whose gleam shifted with the slow rise and fall of her deep breast. There was invitation in the black eyes, soft as velvet, in the curve of the full red lips; she was like a great ripe peach, sun-warmed and luscious—but in Piero's mind was a magic moment of dawn when he had been swept out of his known self by a mighty tide of passion.

"Your price?" she murmured in Italian.

"The rose, after your lips have touched it," he answered, pulling down the spray and handing it to her. She broke off the bud, then laid it on the dial and caught his hand.

"See, your hand is bleeding!"

"I must have torn it on a thorn."

She took her wisp of lace and lawn handkerchief and twisted it round his finger, glancing sidelong at him and wondering why, instead of responding to her touch, he looked suddenly grim. For a moment he had forgotten her and the southern sun, and stood in a dark stable under the iron northern sky, while Margaret bandaged his left hand.

"You are very grave," said Donna Julia, with mouth curved ready for his.

He picked up the white rose, stained with blood, and thrust it into the emerald buckle of his lace cravat.

"Why have I lived so short a time?" he laughed. "But those few hours I have spent with you."

She bent over the sun-dial, and her scented hair brushing his cheek, traced the trite old motto: "*Horas non numero nisi serenas.*"

"Since you are still so young, *Principe,* perchance you have a long life to come."

"Alas, not yet! I leave Avignon to-morrow."

"For long?"

"Chi lo sa? 'Didoman non c' è certezza!'"

"Do not forget the rest," she said as she followed him.

"'Chi vuol esser lieto, sia!'"

"When I return——"

"You will return?"

"Sicuro! Since I leave my heart behind."

He did not see the colour stain the clear olive of her cheek, for he was looking at the Papal legate, Monsignor Salviati, who stood at the top of the steps, the sun blazing on the fine lace of his rochet and the warm purple of his mozetta and soutane. The prelate watched the approach of Donna Julia, resplendent as a peacock, and Piero, his dark close hair a shining contrast to the heavy wigs of the other men, his satin coat the colour of the emeralds at his throat and in the great Borgia ring on his strong, brown left hand.

As Julia's father, the lord of Goult, straightened himself after kissing the sapphire ring, Monsignor murmured to him:

"A very beautiful pair, unless perchance you aimed higher for her."

"Venus rising from the sea," whispered Piero in Julia's ear, as she rose from her curtsey; then he bent over the plump white hand which motioned him to remain.

"You are in the King's confidence, Prince," said the prelate, as he swept to a seat sheltered by a giant stone pine from the sun, and he was conscious of an almost imperceptible stiffening of the lithe form beside him.

"Does any man completely know another, Monseigneur?" parried Piero.

The other sank on to the seat with a sigh of relief, waving a hand over the gardens, the brilliant view of dazzling sun, velvet shadows, white marble shimmering with heat, flame and gold of roses, pale lemons amid their white blossom, and at the end of the vista a glimpse of the Rhone, clear and green, sweeping south to Tarascon, Arles and the sea. And beyond the fertile Provençal plain in the far distance the jagged, snow-clad outline of the Alps was silhouetted against the cloudless sky.

"A feast of the eye," said the legate.

"Like home," answered Piero. "Better than Scotland or Paris."

"Your home is beautiful. Do you never long to return?"

"Not while I serve the King."

"Some day, though, you should have a son to succeed you."

"The King and his service come first."

The black eyes under their grey brows met Piero's keenly.

"The King, too, needs sons. The Cause hangs on the thread of his life; and how frail a thread is human life, my son, with all its youth, strength, beauty, happiness. *'Ut pulverem ante faciem venti!'* If he were to die now—which God forbid!—the Jacobite Cause, the hope of a Catholic dynasty on the English throne, of the return of England to the true Faith, all would perish with him."

Piero was silent. There had been intrigues and suggestions of possible marriages for the King, but that he should marry and have children had seemed so remote a probability that he had hardly considered it. That he himself should do so was yet more improbable. Then, suddenly, he felt stirring again in him

that devastating passion which had blotted out all else when he had held Margaret in his arms—a passion which had its roots in something deeper and more abiding than the mere call of youth to youth, of hot southern blood to its kin, that sprang from the most primitive of all nature's instincts, the most unchanging of all man's desires, the need for new life, to create new beings that are blood of his blood, bone of his bone, to come after him. And then rose in him the older, stronger loyalty, that was all of mind and heart, none of the flesh, his love and friendship for the King, and as he stood up, feeling, half-stifled, and wishing to escape the searching gaze of Salviati's eyes, he saw the King coming along the terrace with Madame d'Eyssautier.

The legate rose to greet them, and Madame laid a hand on Piero's arm as they turned back towards the house.

"The King is happy to-day. I am glad," she said. "He grieves too much for the past."

"Perhaps also for the future," answered Piero rather sombrely; then he smiled at her charmingly: "You will cheer him when I am gone? Make him dance, hunt and be happy for a little while."

"And Donna Julia?" asked Madame, with a little pressure on Piero's arm.

"Chi lo sa?" he answered again; then, as he rode back with the King to the palace next the church of St. Didier, he was full of talk and laughter.

"You have enjoyed to-day?" he asked as they went up to the King's room.

"And you, it seems," said James, "since you have a love token."

Piero drew the forgotten rose from his throat; it was drooping to death and the blood which had coloured the fresh white petals with so vivid a scarlet was a

dull rusty stain. A sudden shadow came over him—the shadow of the future; the White Rose of the Stuart Cause, the gallant blood shed for it so gladly and generously, only half-forgotten memories. "As dust blown before the face of the wind," the legate had said, so vanished youth, beauty, happiness, life itself.

He crushed the rose in his hand and flung it out into the street, where the horses' hoofs trampled it into the dust as they were led away.

"What is it, *Piero mio?*" asked the King gently.

Piero turned and took James's shoulders almost fiercely.

"Tout passe! Tout casse!" he said. *"Dio mio!* How thin you are. Your bones cut me through your coat."

James put up his hands and took Piero's with a smile.

"What else do you expect if you grip so hard? But what is wrong?"

"I cannot tell you, but I am afraid."

"Of what?"

"Nothing lasts."

He stood looking out of the window where the castle of St. André caught the last rays of the sun as it frowned defiance at the great pile of the Papal palace.

"Love lasts," said James, putting an arm about his shoulder, "because it endureth all things and hopeth all things."

There was silence. The darkness of Piero's hair merged into the flame of the King's coat as twilight fell, then the door at the far end of the room opened and there was a patter of dog's feet as François brought in light and announced that supper was served.

James gave a cry as he saw a greyhound before him.

"Minette!" he exclaimed incredulously; then Piero laughed softly.

"My birthday present to you, *carissimo*," he said. "Everywhere have François and I searched till at last we found a greyhound of the size and colour of Minette. He will keep you company when I am gone."

2

The King rode half-way to Orange with Piero the next day, and they dined at a little inn looking over the Rhone, on fresh-caught crayfish and trout, roast capon with salad and the first dish of wild strawberries. They lingered till the sun began to sink low above the Cevennes, turning the Alps to rose and filling the wide valley of the Rhone with golden haze. Silence fell. It was one of those perfect moments which life gives only too rarely, moments of magic happiness so exquisite and fragile that word or movement, sound or touch may shatter the spell and send mere mortal hurtling again to common earth.

The greyhound stood up, yawned and laid a paw on the King's knee, looking up at him with eyes as lustrous and adoring as those of Minette. The King took the fine paw in his hand and smiled at Piero.

"You see that already Griset has taken upon himself to look after me. He knows it is time for us to be going."

As Piero stood up the sun shone on his riding coat of fine green cloth laced with gold, and his long waistcoat of fine buff Spanish leather that matched his high riding boots and embroidered gloves. He buckled on his rapier, took up his black hat with its gay green feather and his gloves, then flung them down again and held out both hands.

"To-day has been the crown of a very perfect time,"

he said. "Perhaps that is why I am afraid. Or perhaps it is only because I have to leave you."

"*Caro mio,* I shall be safe. François rides with me, and have I not Griset?"

"I feel that this is the end."

"You are fanciful as a woman, Piero. Nothing can end our friendship—neither life nor death."

Piero shook his head; then he raised the King's hands to his lips, kissed each one in turn long and tenderly, and was gone. James stood on the little terrace, watching him as he mounted Roxane, looked up, waved, set the mare to a canter and vanished along the northward road.

It was twilight when he reached Orange; dark by the time he had seen Roxane comfortably stabled and had his own supper; but restlessness made it impossible to remain indoors or to go to bed. The *bise* had risen as the sun went down, and was blowing down the street as he stood at the inn door, wondering if his nerves were the result of the piercing dry cold of this north wind or the aftermath of his farewell to James and the presentiment that had shadowed it. He flung his purple cloak round him and strolled outside the town to the Roman arch and theatre. Above him the sky sparkled with a million stars, sharp and bright as diamond dust; round the towering mass of the amphitheatre and through the span of the triumphal arch the bitter wind blew, keen, searching, pitiless. A little whirl of white dust rose and spun before it past Piero's feet. "As dust blown before the wind," so had gone the Roman legions who had passed in mailclad triumph under the arch on their way south to the sea and Rome; so had gone the Moors, their fierce Moslem splendour broken by the Christian swords and axes of Charles Martel's Franks; so had gone those countless thousands of Crusaders surging east to die for the Holy Places over which now floated the

Crescent of Mohommed. So had gone twenty generations of the Princes of Orange, who had made the great theatre an outwork of their castle on the hill; so had gone the last and greatest of them all, Dutch Stadtholder and King of England, the fiery and dauntless spirit which had consumed so quickly its frail vesture of clay; so had gone that other great little man, Louis XIV, his arch-opponent.

Piero turned abruptly and clambered the eighty feet to the topmost tier of the amphitheatre, looking down into the darkness, filled now with crumbling and ruined sheds and stables housing the outcasts of the town, where two thousand years ago fifty thousand men and women had shouted as the white sand reddened with blood. Gone too, and what was left?

Love, James had said, love which endures and suffers, triumphant even over death. But he remembered those other words of his in the inn at Montélimart: "Perfection must satisfy the whole man, body, mind and soul." And how could all be satisfied after death, when naught but the soul remained and fair, strong beautiful bodies were dust and ashes?

He shivered, and jumping down from tier to tier, came back into the town along a little lane with high walls on each side. It ended, however, in an old iron-studded door, and he turned back. Before he had gone more than a few yards he stopped, crouched behind a buttress and listened. A man was speaking in French with an execrable accent.

"I will engage her attention while you two seize her; gag her at all costs, for no alarm must be given. Hush! I think she is coming."

The silence was broken by the approaching tap of high heels. Piero hesitated. He knew nothing of the rights and wrongs of the drama being staged within hearing but

out of sight, and his own safety was of paramount importance to the King, for none but he could conduct with any chance of success the delicate mission on which he was bent.

The voice spoke again, but in English, so that Piero could not understand, then a stifled cry from a woman and the sound of a scuffle put an end to his hesitation. Along the top of the wall ran a *chevaux-de-frise*. Piero leapt up, with one hand caught the iron bar supporting the spikes, flung his cloak over them, and dropped into a group of three men and a woman lying on the ground with head and face muffled in a dark cloak. The Englishman called sharply to the other two to engage Piero and they attacked him with a fury which left him no chance of tackling their chief, who was engaged in searching the woman. It was impossible to see clearly, for the rising moon only caught the top of the wall, leaving the narrow, tree-grown garden in darkness that the faint starlight was powerless to pierce. Piero felt his point go through flesh, jar against bone, and there was a yell of agony, then his foot caught in a root while the heavy sword of his other adversary, instead of getting his head, was left fixed in the tree-trunk. Piero, falling against the feet of this unwounded man, brought him crashing to the ground, then, leaping catlike to his feet, he stood panting, rapier in one hand, dagger in the other, waiting for a renewed attack. There was a crashing as the wounded man made his escape through the bushes; the other did not move when Piero stirred him with a foot, then the third straightened himself from bending over the woman and put his hand to his mouth.

"Damn the vixen!" he said; "she has devilish sharp teeth and strong as well. So much for these gags adjusted in a hurry. Have you finished the intruder? We'd better drop him in the river."

Piero advanced.

"Monsieur, I am here, at your service. On guard, if you please!"

The other lunged suddenly and began a fight remarkable on his side for strength and determination rather than for skill. Piero himself found little scope for finesse; the ground was uneven; the little light there was varied from total darkness under the trees to faint starlight between them, with every now and then a puzzling gleam as the moon was reflected from the windows of a summer-house near by. The Englishman made a furious attack; Piero made an over-arm time-thrust, disengaged and lunged at his right shoulder. The other, however, swerved unexpectedly, got the point between his left ribs, spun round and fell like a stone.

Piero bent over him, slipped a hand inside his coat; the heart had already ceased to beat. He drew out his hand, dripping with blood, sheathed his rapier and turned to the woman who had struggled to her feet, but still stood muffled in her cloak. He stepped behind her, with his dagger cut the cords round her wrists, then, as she flung off cloak and hood, he slit the knot of the roughly tied bandage over her face. As she turned and before he saw her face a sudden blow on the back of his head sent him in a crumpled heap at her feet. He dimly saw a dark form bending over him, the glitter of a down-coming blade, then the next thing he was conscious of was looking up into Margaret Ogilvie's face. He heard her give a little sigh of relief.

"I almost began to be afraid you were dead."

"Not yet, Mademoiselle."

He tried to sit up, but his head swam, and she pushed him firmly but gently back.

"Don't move for a moment. I will run in and get some wine, then perhaps you will be able to get to the summer-house with my help."

He nodded, feeling most deadly and unromantically sick, and when she got back submitted without a murmur as she slipped her arm under him and supported his head against her shoulder while she held a bowl of wine to his lips. He drank and smiled at her; for the moment he was content to lie there, her strong arm about him, his aching head against the rounded warmth of her shoulder, then fuller consciousness returned and he struggled to his feet.

"If you would give me your arm, Mademoiselle, as you suggested, I could reach the summer-house, and you can tell me what has happened and how I can help you."

In the few yards between them and shelter they passed the body of a man lying queerly doubled up, a dagger still clenched in his right hand, the whites of his upturned eyes gleaming, his lips drawn back from his clenched teeth, and a scratch across his right cheek on which the blood was congealing.

"Is that the one who hit me from behind and would have stabbed me if you had not prevented him?"

He felt Margaret shiver as she whispered:

"He is dead."

Piero straightened himself, and the arm she had bidden him put round her shoulder for support slipped to her waist.

"You killed him," he asked very low, "to save me?"

She stepped quickly into the little shelter and he sat down by her on the rough wooden seat.

"I caught his hand just in time, before the dagger reached you," she said. "He seized both my hands in his left one, but I got my right free and swung it with all my strength against his face. My ring must have cut his cheek for he dropped my other hand, jumped back, then quite suddenly doubled backward and fell dead."

She shuddered again and hid her face in her hands; then Piero took her right hand.

"Look, Mademoiselle," he said, and they bent together over the emerald which emitted a sinister gleam in the moonlight.

"The stone is twisted in its setting," she cried.

"Do you not remember the day at Dundee when you looked at mine and I promised the next time we met to show you how the Borgia poison worked?"

He touched the stone, and it slipped back into place, but her hand still lay on his.

"The rings are the same," he said, "save that the gold setting of mine is a pattern of grapes and yours of corn-ears."

"The next time," she said slowly, not answering him. "But we did not meet till Montrose."

She felt him tense, but before he could draw away his hand she caught it in both of hers.

"Monsieur le Prince, must you still hate me?"

"How can I help it? You have saved my life twice; but for you I should have lost my left hand and yet—"

He moved uneasily.

"You mean that loyalty to the King comes first?"

He nodded, head bent, eyes downcast.

"Do you not realize that I think so, too?" she asked; "that I would gladly torture myself, if by so doing I could make amends for that vile and cruel outbreak. What I said was because I was mad and foolish enough to think that the King had failed the Cause."

"And now you know he did not?"

"I know he neither did nor could, because he is the Cause. I have vowed myself heart and soul, body and life to it; promised to sacrifice all other loyalties, if needs be myself, to this one great one. And you, too, live only for the King—his success, his happiness."

He lifted his head, and their eyes met in a long unfaltering gaze.

"Monsieur le Prince," she said again, "I know you have hated me, and with reason. I too have hated you, but with less. Surely now we should both be willing to sink hatred and jealousy in love and loyalty."

"God knows there are enough quarrels, angers and jealousies among the King's followers," he said sombrely; then he smiled suddenly: "Mademoiselle, will you forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive."

"That insult at the *Nid au Bois*."

"Since it was only for love of the King, how could I think it needs pardon? It is forgotten, so that now we can stand shoulder to shoulder as fellow-fighters for the King."

"As friends also, Mademoiselle," he answered; then asked abruptly: "What happened and why did they attack you? I suppose they thought you carried something of value."

"They knew it," she said, and he watched her as she coiled up her hair, and wondered why she drew out one curl and thrust it into her breast.

"They tried to get the papers before, at Fontainebleau," she went on; "but I was not sure if letter and messenger were in truth from Monsieur de Sarci, so sent but one sheet of mine own writing."

"Saying?"

"His words to me: 'Into no hands but the King's.'"

"So that he would know it was truly from you? But also Stair, when he read it, if he did, would know that you indeed carried the papers."

She gave a cry of dismay, and her hand went involuntarily to her breast.

"I had not thought of that. They made no further

attempt till to-night; when Marie brought me a note: 'I wait for you in the garden. J.R.' I never feared a trap, thinking Monsieur de Sarci had bidden the King come."

She pulled out a little twist of paper and handed it to him.

"That is not writ in the King's hand," he said. "But I would I knew what to do. I like not leaving you unprotected, yet my own mission brooks of no delay."

"We reach Avignon to-morrow, to pass through on our way to my aunt's chateau in Vaucluse. I persuaded her to this, instead of turning east from here, as she had planned."

Piero stood up.

"Use your ring at the Entraigues palace to gain admittance, Mademoiselle; ask for François. He will think it mine. You will find the King about midday; he is hunting in the morning. Now you must go in; I will bring you to the door."

"Marie is waiting for me there."

"After that I will return and drag those two under the bushes, so they will not be discovered till after you have gone. The ground is hard, so there will be no signs of a struggle."

"I will help you; you cannot do it alone."

"My head swims a little when I move, but I can make shift."

"Are friends too proud to take help from friends?" she asked, and took the feet of the poisoned man while he lifted the shoulders, and between them they dragged the body under a tangle of shrubs. Then as Piero took the shoulders of the man he had killed, the moonlight fell on the dead face.

"Major Royland!" exclaimed Margaret: "I did not see his face when he spoke to me, for he was masked."

"You know him then?"

"He was a prisoner at Dundee and dined with my uncle the day you were at our house. He was to ride to Perth with the letter to trap the King, but I drugged him."

"Then Fraser is in this."

"I think so. He's in France and in Stair's employ, for I saw them together at Fontainebleau."

Piero let the dead man slip to the ground.

"Then *I* am in this too, Mademoiselle, for I've a grudge —nay two—against Fraser, and will not rest till the debt is paid."

"Remember your mission, and the King. How would he fare without you?"

Piero, without answering, dragged Royland's body out of sight, strewed some earth over the stain of blood and trod it down; then, as he rejoined Margaret, he stooped and picked up something from the path.

"This white ivory rose and gold chain, they are yours, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, Royland must have broken the chain when he was searching me. I always wear the rose about my neck."

Piero stood looking at it as it gleamed white in the palm of his hand.

"You wear it at your heart for love of the giver?"

She laughed.

"Oh, no; I wear it only because it is the King's symbol, and I sealed that letter with it that Monsieur de Sarci, who gave it to me, might know from whom it came."

"Do you desire it again?"

"Why, yes, unless . . . Have you, too, a collection of ivories and would fain add this to it?"

He laughed scornfully.

"Mademoiselle, I do not aspire to emulate the *chinoiserie* of Monsieur le Marquis. But if I may keep it in memory of to-night?"

"If I could give you more——"

"You can—your promise that you will not expose yourself to any further danger, that you will not sleep alone to-night nor venture forth on any pretext till you enter the coach with your aunt to-morrow, nor leave it without her till you enter the Entraigues palace to deliver the papers into the King's hands. After that I think Stair's men will trouble you no more."

They were near the open door where Marie stood waiting and Margaret whispered:

"Will you not come this way? 'Tis easier for you, and all are abed but we two."

"No, I'll begone the way I came, for my cloak's on the wall, and it had best not be found there."

He thrust the rose into the breast of his coat, then drew her into the shadow.

"You have not answered me. Have I your promise?"

"Monsieur le Prince," she mocked, "your humble servant will not dare to disobey your commands."

She vanished into the inn, and the door shut behind her; then as he turned to go she came running and laid a hand on his arm.

"I have given you my white rose and my promise. Am I to have nothing in return?"

"What you will."

"Then in return I ask your promise to run no danger unless you must; to guard yourself as carefully as may be on your mission."

He caught her hands as she would have gone in again.

"For the King's sake?" he asked.

"For the King's sake," she answered, "and your friend's."

In the yellow light from the door and the white shining of the moon he could see the colour stain her face, see the lace at her breast stirred by her quick breaths; once more their eyes held each other in long, unfaltering gaze, then hers fell before his. He felt her fingers flutter under his lips, then she was gone.

CHAPTER II

A WOMAN SCORNED

The Duke of Mar came into the reception room of the Entraigues palace and bowed to the legate, who was standing by the window looking down into the narrow street, almost deserted in the midday heat.

"I regret you should be kept waiting," said Mar. "His Majesty went hunting early this morning, but should have returned by now."

"No matter, no matter!" murmured Monsignor Salviati, waving a plump white hand; "'tis not a day to hurry."

Mar wiped the sweat from his empurpled brow.

"Faith! this heat is too much for us Northerners. It makes us pine for the moors and mists of Scotland."

"Your Grace knows the old saying about Avignon? *'Avenio ventose, sine vento venenosa cum vento fasdidiosa.*"

"Not being a Churchman, I fear my Latin's but indifferent."

"'Windy Avignon,'" translated Salviati, with a sarcastic little smile; "'plague-stricken without wind, yet ever plagued with wind.' Ah! there is the King coming down the street on his famous black. I'll not keep him long, for no doubt he's not yet dined."

A moment later the King came into the room, followed by Griset. He wore his own curly, dark-auburn hair; his coat of russet, the colour of the red-hazel eyes, opened over the lawn shirt and lace cravat; there was a stain of blood on the ruffle at his left wrist, and his doe-skin

boots were splashed with mud. As he flung his hat and gloves on to a chair and apologized for his lateness the legate smiled up at the beautiful face, browned with sun and wind and speed.

"My son, I am the last to wish to spoil a good day's hunting. I am sure his Grace of Mar will agree with me that you should be more gay, work less hard and enjoy the amusements our good people plan for you. I will keep you but a few moments from your dinner."

He looked meaningly at Mar, who, with a scowl, bowed and withdrew, almost colliding in the ante-room with one of the ecclesiastics who had accompanied the legate, a pale young man with downcast eyes.

The other, the Abbé of the adjoining church of St. Didier and the King's chaplain, barely looked up from his breviary to acknowledge Mar's perfunctory greeting before the Scotsman banged the door behind him.

As the King sat down, the legate drew out a packet bearing the Papal seal.

"I received various letters from Rome this morning, Sire. There is here one from the Holy Father himself, and I think that it is only right that you should hear that part of it relating to yourself."

The King nodded, and the legate, having put on his horn-rimmed spectacles, smoothed out the heavy sheet and read from the letter of Pope Clement XI:

> "We cannot agree with those who call the King of England unhappy and unfortunate; but rather, using the language of the Church who calls martyrs happy and martyrdoms triumphs, we consider him most happy and fortunate who finds himself exiled from his kingdom, abandoned by the whole world and reduced to penury for no other reason than for having remained faithful to God and constant to the Catholic religion.

. . . Moreover, were the King of England in peaceful and unquestioned possession of his kingdom, he would have in history, sacred as well as profane, many superiors and innumerable equals; deprived of it for such a cause, there may perhaps be found none to surpass him and very few to compare with him."

The Cardinal folded up the sheet, but the King did not speak, so he continued:

"There is one other matter, my son, for which I must ask your attention, but as I do not wish to delay you I will plunge *in medias res* at once. I am right, am I not, in supposing that the opposition of the Imperial Court has decided the Elector Palatinate against the project of your marriage? But I understand that his successor, Prince Charles Philip, may be willing to entertain the idea of an alliance between his daughter and yourself."

"Monsignor, I do not wish to press the suit which was decided on by others, not by myself."

"The Landgrave of Hesse also has a daughter who, I am told, is the prettiest young creature of eighteen in the world."

James drummed his long fingers impatiently on the table while the other went on with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Your Majesty's great uncle, Duke Rinaldo d'Este, has three daughters, the two eldest beauties."

"If they are but the palest reflection of my mother they must indeed be beautiful."

" 'Tis perhaps scarce the usual reason that a man weds, to find a faint memory of his mother."

"Why are you joined in this conspiracy, Monsignor? I have but now writ my mother of another such proposal, desiring her put it off in a civil manner, as she

well knows how, and suggesting this should be done without saying that I know aught of the matter."

"Yet, my son, you should marry, and that soon. The Holy Father knows this as well as I and your other advisers, and has bid me urge you to it. I need not speak to you of the sacredness of marriage, nor of it as a Sacrament of the Church. But indeed, as the Bible tells us, it is not good for man to be alone."

"But if he is happier so? And what of St. Paul, who says that marriage is good, but virginity better?"

"You have a duty, Sire, other than to your own happiness. Your Cause demands this. It hangs upon your life alone. With you gone all were lost. Each son of yours—nay, each child—will bring nearer the restoration of your house and of the Church in England."

James had risen and stood looking over the red roofs of the drowsy, sun-baked town, across the plain to the distant heights, clear, cold, aloof against the sky.

"If it is my duty to the Church and to my country," he said slowly.

"Then I know you will, as ever, obey the dictates of your conscience."

The legate had followed him to the window, and taking off his spectacles, looked down into the street.

"A lumbering foreign make of coach," he said; "and the two women from it are evidently more of your Majesty's exiled followers. I trust they will keep you no longer from your dinner than I have already done."

James answered impatiently as François came in to say a lady demanded an audience.

"I'll see none till I've dined. Her business is not half so urgent as my dinner. Bid them send it to me here. And you, Monsignor?"

"I have already dined."

As the legate was about to leave a servant came in

with a tray, followed by François, who held out to the King a great square emerald ring.

"Mademoiselle said when you saw this you would no longer refuse her."

The King snatched the ring.

"Send her up at once, but at once! God send no ill has befallen!"

Salviati saw the pallor of his face and his agitation, and curious to see the end of this strange turn of events, sat down. François returned with Margaret, who had scarcely time to kiss the King's hand before he spoke.

"That ring, Mademoiselle, is it bad news?"

"It is my own, Sire. I but used it to gain admission to your presence."

He looked carefully at it, saw the difference in the setting, then drew himself to his full height, and his low voice was icy.

"Such deceit, Mademoiselle, I should not have expected from one of your name."

He handed her the ring and pointed to the door, but she held her ground.

"It was the Prince of Este's command to me, Sire, that I should use this ring, which, as you see, is almost identical with his."

"You've seen him lately then? Where?"

"At Orange last night, Your Majesty. He saved both me and something of far greater importance."

She glanced at the legate and at François.

"Monsignor," said the King, "you will forgive us if we speak English? You have the papers from de Sarci, Mistress Ogilvie?"

"Safe here, thanks to the Prince of Este."

She put up her hands, pushed back her hood, unrolled one curl and drew out another, which contained the packet.

She slipped off the cover of brown silk and handed it to the King.

"'Into no hands but the King's,' was Monsieur de Sarci's order; it is now fulfilled, and I beg Your Majesty's leave to rejoin my aunt, who is waiting for me."

"I will come down with you," said the King, thrusting the packet into the breast of his coat. "You stay in Avignon, that I may see you again to thank you for your service? How great I dare not tell you yet. But if God wills, this may be the turning point of my fortunes."

"My maid is here, Sire," said Margaret as they reached the door. "I told my aunt I would visit Laura's tomb in the Cordelier's church; she must not know I have been here, so I must haste to rejoin her."

"You are not staying in the city?"

"No; we push on to her chateau at Vaucluse."

When she would have kissed his hand he raised hers to his lips.

"A thousand thanks, Mistress Ogilvie, *et au revoir.*"

She spoke very low and quickly.

"Sire, may I ask one favour?"

"If 'tis in my power to grant it, it is yours."

"Your forgiveness for my base, vile, cruel folly at Montrose. If I might wash it out with my blood——"

He silenced her with a gesture.

"It is forgotten."

"And forgiven?"

"It was that long ago, I hope even before I had left your presence."

She lifted her eyes with an effort and met the almond-shaped hazel ones gazing at her very seriously, then he smiled and bent a little towards her.

"Then we are friends, Mistress, as is the custom with Stuarts and Ogilvies?"

Her cheeks flamed scarlet, and once more, as at Gorntully, the slender, beautiful hand was cool as water at her lips, but now the sensitive fingers were bare of rings and brown with the midsummer sun.

James stood and watched her go down the street followed by Marie, and as he re-entered the palace he sighed. That free, easy gait reminded him of the swing of Highland kilts, of the skirl of pipes, the thundering war-cries of his loyal clans as they swept to death or victory. A rush of home-sickness surged over him. Instead of this stifling, crowded, walled town, green vineyards, giant mulberries, black cypresses, all hard and bright as enamel, he longed for the hills of Scotland as he had dreamed of, but never seen them—proud, free, splendid, under their far-flung plaid of purple heather, scarlet of rowans, silver of birches, gold of bracken, deep grey of mountain tarns, clear amber of peat burns. He would change this sharp, dry, cruel *vent-de-bise* for the damp wind from the western isles; this cloudless, burning sapphire arch for the wide, low sky, the grey driving mist that touches the face as gently as a mother's kiss on her sleeping child's brow.

2

As the King came back into the room François murmured:

"The grilled trout is already ruined. Monsieur le chef is absolutely *éploré*, and will no longer be responsible for the roast hare. In fact, if Your Majesty does not dine at once there will be a veritable catastrophe."

"Avert it, François, by bringing the hare at once. Monsignor, a glass of wine to drink success before you go. I will call Monsieur l'Abbé and the other. Is he a new chaplain of yours?"

"A student at St. Sulpice, Sire, who broke down through overwork and was sent home for a rest. But, as his mother is almost destitute and only has one room in the Rue des Cordeliers, I had him in the Papal palace, where it is cooler and quieter."

James poured out four glasses of wine and brought in the other two clerics.

"Monsignor, Monsieur l'Abbé, and you Monsieur," he said, raising his own glass, "will you drink with me to a turn of fortune?"

The legate noted the flush on the King's face, his shining eyes and air of exhilaration; from the window he had seen him standing on the steps watching Margaret's proud, swift walk, and he drank with a little smile.

"To your Majesty's success!"

"To the fulfilment of all your hopes!" said the Abbé, draining his glass.

"And you, Monsieur," smiled James as he handed the last glass to the young student, who took it with a bow, and was about to raise it to his lips, when the King's clear, steady gaze met and held his restless, haunted eyes. He looked away, replaced the untouched wine on the table so abruptly that some was spilt.

"Forgive me, Monseigneur," he stammered, "but I do not—cannot drink."

James raised his brows as he looked at the thin haggard face.

"It is a pity, Monsieur, that you abstain, since you have been ill. But perhaps Monsieur l'Abbé will remedy your defection."

"'Wine that maketh glad the heart of man,'" chuckled the Abbé, nothing loth. "Such Burgundy as this should be drunk only by the connoisseur who appreciates it at its full value."

As he emptied the second glass and the legate again prepared to leave, François came in with a tray and said something to the King.

"To the devil with her!" exclaimed James impatiently. "This time the most urgent of business gives way to my dinner. What's her name?"

"Grainbé, I think, Mademoiselle Louise."

James frowned and paused in the middle of helping himself, while Griset laid a hungry head on the edge of the table.

"Let her wait in the ante-room till I've done. Monsignor, must you go at once?"

"My siesta could wait, as your dinner has had to do."

"If you would remain during this interview I shall be in your debt."

"If Your Majesty permits," bowed the Abbé, "we two can wait at the far end of the room, where we shall be out of hearing."

The legate sat down by the window, almost hidden by the crimson velvet curtain, and as François ushered in Louise Granby the King stood very erect, his right hand resting on the greyhound's head instead of his extending it to be kissed. Louise's three-cornered hat and her green riding habit were white with dust, and as she rose from her curtsey she spoke at once.

"Sire, I have ridden all day, scarce drawing rein, such is the urgency of my mission."

The King neither moved nor spoke, and she continued a little breathlessly:

"The papers, Sire, the papers from England."

"What of them?"

"Lord Stair had news of their coming."

"Obviously, since the messenger who carried them was killed."

"But they were recovered and forwarded to Your Majesty by another hand."

"I have them."

"Impossible, Sire."

"They were delivered an hour ago or less."

"That cannot be."

"Dare you call me liar, Mademoiselle?" he asked coldly; then drew the packet from his breast and laid it on the table, his right hand on it. "They are here."

"Those are not the papers. You have not even broken the seal to verify them."

"The messenger who delivered them is guarantee enough that they are genuine."

She laughed scornfully.

"Your Majesty's trust in human nature will prove your undoing. Because you yourself are incapable of evil thought or mean deed you believe all men and women to be like yourself."

"Need we prolong this interview?"

She drew from the breast of her habit a duplicate packet, the same size, colour and sealing, and flung it on the table.

"Perhaps this will convince you that your messenger was knave, not fool, and the trap well-baited."

"Silence, woman! Go! And never dare to enter my presence again!"

Then her self-control broke. The creamy pallor of her face darkened, the smooth voice became hoarse and harsh.

"Does it then wound you so deeply to know that Margaret Ogilvie is in her kinsman's pay? Did you not hear of her visits to the Embassy? She must be applauded for playing Stair's game so cunningly that your trust in her is thus blind and unquestioning. You spurned my love and service only to become her slave. Will you make her Queen instead of mistress?"

James took one step forward and flung out his right hand so sharply that she shrank back as if to avoid a blow; but before he could speak Griset—who had growled when she had come in—leapt, bore her backwards to her knees and, but for his master's swift clasp on his collar, his white teeth would have been in her throat. The legate rose from his seat; the Abbé looked up from his breviary, the young student started forward, while the King, still holding Griset, towered above the crouching woman, his eyes flaming in his white face.

"Love?" he said in a low, tense voice. "It is blasphemy that such a word should be on lips, in heart, so vile as yours. Paid spy of Stair's, you tempted me with yourself and the betrayal of your employer's secrets. Now you try to sully a name you are not fit to utter. Go back to your master with your forged papers and see how he treats those who fail him! He demands success in those he pays so well."

He turned and struck sharply on a little silver bell till François ran in; then, still holding the growling dog, he pointed with his left hand to the door.

"Never, François, if you would remain in my service, dare to admit that woman to my presence, nor allow any other to do so. I will never see her face again."

Louise drew herself up with a little hissing intake of her breath.

"You *shall* see my face again before you die, *Monsieur le Prétendant,* whatever your orders to your valet."

The silence was broken by the swish of her green skirt on the polished floor and the dog's growling, which ceased only when the door had closed behind her. James drew out his handkerchief and wiped his fingers, though indeed he had not touched her, then he picked up the packet from the table, thrust it into his breast, and turned to the legate.

"Your siesta, Monsignor. I regret to have so curtailed it, but you see that I was wise to ask your presence."

"I would you were more careful of yourself, my son," said Salviati, as they went downstairs followed by the Abbé and the student. "It is unwise of you to have no guard. Cannot I persuade you to place one of my own Swiss at the palace door? Again I must remind you that the Cause hangs on your life alone and your enemies will not hesitate, as they have not hesitated in the past, to use knife, pistol or poison against you."

When James reached the small room leading from his bedroom, and where he wrote and transacted business, he sat down at the writing-table, drew the packet from his coat and examined it. It was sealed in half a dozen places, as he had seen when Margaret handed it to him, with the de Sarci arms. This Jules had told him it would be. He broke the seals, opened the cover, and half a dozen sheets of blank paper fell out. For a moment he sat as if turned to stone, then strode into the great hall. He told himself he must have taken the wrong packet; the right one must still be lying where he had so foolishly left it in his blind anger.

The table was as he had left it, the plate with the half-finished helping of hare pushed to one side. Everyone in the palace was apparently asleep; even François seemed to have gone to his siesta. But no packet lay on the table nor anywhere in the room. James remembered keeping his hand on it till the instant Griset had sprung. It was impossible that Louise could have taken it; she had been some distance from the table, and after Griset's attack had risen to her feet only to leave the room. But there had been those few moments when he had gone downstairs with the legate and to his own room. Could she or someone else have slipped back, snatched the

genuine packet and made their escape? She must be found, and at once, but none must know of the loss.

The King returned to his writing-room and called François.

"Did you see Mademoiselle Granby from the palace?"

"I stood at the door watching till she turned the far corner of the street."

"She cannot have returned?"

"Impossible, Sire."

"Was anyone in the hall after I left it with Monsignor Salviati?"

"None, Sire. I locked the door to the back stairs the time I came in answer to your ringing."

"Why did you do that?"

"I could see something was afoot, and it were better the servants should not see nor hear what they should not. Spies are everywhere."

"You did well, François. Who is that at the door?"

"The Duke of Mar, Sire, who says the messenger for Paris and England starts to-night and he has papers for your signature."

"Admit him. One moment, François. I know I can trust you to be silent. Search for Mademoiselle Granby. I must at all costs see her, but no word to a living soul save myself."

His Grace of Mar was in a bad temper. The heat, which was sultry and overpowering, suited neither his figure nor his constitution. His self-esteem was ruffled at having been given his congé by the legate, whom he hated with sound Presbyterian fervour; also he was consumed with curiosity to know details of the King's successive interviews with two women, of which he had heard from servants' gossip. He found the King, however, as little communicative as it was possible for human creature to be. Letters were discussed, papers signed,

one or two alterations made; one suggested proposal of marriage was vetoed with what Mar considered quite unnecessary vigour. Then re-occurred the offer made a little while before by the Duke of Leeds to approach his old shipmate, Admiral Baker, who was in command of the British fleet in the Mediterranean.

"His Grace writes that he will be responsible with his head for Your Majesty's restoration," said Mar, "if the Admiral can be persuaded to support the Jacobite Cause, and he thinks little persuasion will be needed. Then, on the way to England through the Strait of Gibraltar, the fleet can embark five thousand of our Irish troops in Spain to land in England and our battle is as good as won."

"Not being sure of the Irish troops, on which supposition depends your whole plan," said the King, "'tis vain to move in the matter till we know if they be granted us."

"Doubtless the irresistible fascination of the Prince of Este will induce His Spanish Majesty to place his entire army at your disposal," replied Mar acidly; "but we can do nothing without the papers from England. They should have come before now, if the Marquis de Sarci despatched them as arranged, and if his messenger is to be trusted. I presume Your Majesty has had no news of them."

The King's eyes met Mar's shifty blue ones without faltering.

"You shall be apprised when they are in my possession," he said; "I need now no longer detain your Grace. 'Tis no weather to work late."

"A damnable climate," grumbled Mar, gathering the papers and preparing to leave. "The thunder may clear the air. It needs it."

The King went into his room, tore off his coat, pushed

back his hair wearily and leant from the window. Overhead the sky was copper-colour, except in the east, where the lightning flickered across slate-coloured storm-clouds that were piling up as if to fling defiance at the cliff-like façade of the Popes' palace that towered above the red roofs huddled about its feet. Not a breath of air stirred; the town was like a city of the dead; the only sounds the growl of the approaching storm and an answering growl from Griset as he stirred in his sleep at the foot of the bed.

François came quietly in.

"You are tired, Sire; it is the thunder, perhaps a touch of the sun."

"Weary to death, François. But what of Mademoiselle Granby?"

"Her horse and servant are at the *Pluie d'Or,* but she has not returned there. The landlord will let me know when she does and where she goes."

"*Bien.* There is nothing more to be done for the present."

"Your Majesty will rest now? And I will bring you a small supper, but tasty, to your writing-room. Monsieur le chef shall excel himself, and this time there shall be no delay. And a small bottle of that famous *Vin de Champagne* that Monsieur l'Abbé brought for us."

James let François pull off his hunting-boots and slip on an embroidered gown of fine blue Chinese silk that Père de St. Etienne had brought from Pekin, then he flung himself onto the bed.

Sleep would not come. The electric tension of the air, the events of the last few hours had strung his nerves almost to breaking point. He lay still and straight, like a marble Crusader on a tomb with his sleeping hound at his feet, but his mind worked at top speed.

Again and again he recalled every detail of his inter-

view with Louise—her departure and the legate's, his own return and discovery of the loss of the papers. He knew his hand had never left the packet till Griset's outbreak, knew that after that his whole attention had for the time been absorbed in the consuming anger which rose in him so rarely, but when it did burned with such devastating and remorseless force that only years of iron self-discipline had enabled him to control it.

He could scarcely in reason blame himself, yet whom else could he blame? He had flung back Louise Granby's accusation with unfaltering belief in Margaret's loyalty and devotion, but now, against his will, an unworthy misgiving insinuated itself snake-like into his mind. Piero's doubts of her on the Perth road—her outburst at Montrose—François seeing her leave Stair's house in Paris—his own narrow escape from capture when with her at the masked ball and now this dummy packet instead of those irreplaceable papers on which depended all hopes of a successful rising in England—all these combined to make a formidable indictment.

He could not confess to loss of the papers without casting a shadow on Margaret's honour; he must strain every nerve, run any risk in the attempt to recover them, since on them hung not only his own hopes, but the lives and safety of so many of his faithful followers.

As François summoned him to supper in the adjoining room the storm was almost overhead, the flash of lightning and crash of thunder nearly simultaneous; but presently a tropical downpour of rain began, and the flames of the candles which had burned steadily between the open door and windows swayed a little in the stirring of the cooled air.

James smiled at François when he came to clear away the remains of supper.

"*Ca va mieux.* After the storm it will be better still.

I shall not need you again, François. Before long Griset and I shall go to bed."

"And to sleep, one hopes," nodded François. "A long rest, without dreams."

James sat motionless for a moment. "A long rest without dreams." It was indeed to be longed and prayed for. He was, as he had said, weary to death—weary of misfortune, exile, poverty, treachery, jealousies, and of loneliness. He had fancied that in Margaret he might have found a friend as well as a staunch adherent, and Piero had gone—every day, every hour, taking him farther from Avignon on that delicate and dangerous mission which could be entrusted to none but him.

He rose and went down the little stair which led from his room to the door into the adjoining church of St. Didier. Griset lay down outside it with an air of puzzled resignation, and through the dimness the King made his way towards the small gleam of the red lamp which burned serene and steady amid the flickering glare of lightning, the mutter of thunder and the wild rush of rain. As he knelt down the words of the Pope's letter which the legate had read to him that morning came back to him:

> "We consider him most happy and fortunate who finds himself exiled from his kingdom, abandoned by the whole world and reduced to penury for no other reason than for having remained faithful to God and constant to the Catholic religion."

He looked back once again over the twenty-eight years of his life, and could remember no instance in which he had consciously and deliberately set creature before Creator, worldly interest before his religion. As in the convent chapel at Chaillot, he knew that beside the things of God the gifts of this world were but dust and ashes,

the regalia of royalty and the pleasures of riches and power only a weariness of flesh and mind.

An exile from home and his rightful kingdom, abandoned and betrayed by his own followers, poor and persecuted, he knew that he "had chosen the better part," for: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?"

St. Ignatius's description of the Third Degree of Humility came to his mind and his lips:

"I wish and choose rather poverty with Christ poor than riches—reproaches with Christ laden with reproaches rather than honours—and I desire to be accounted a good-for-nothing and a fool for Christ's sake."

Once again the King went to the window as he entered his room. The storm was passing away towards the Cevennes; in the east a golden star shone in the clear sky, which was already paling before the rising of the moon. The cool air was full of the lovely smell of earth grateful for rain after long weeks of drought and the perfume of bruised roses and lilies and drooping syringa. A familiar sound caught his ear, the scratching of a dog at the door, then a sharp growl made him wheel sharply just in time to see in the dusk the gleam of a pale face, the glitter of a bare blade. He caught the hand before the dagger fell, held it in so tight a grip that there was a low cry of pain, then a flash of lightning revealed Louise Granby. With a quick turn of the wrist he forced her to drop the dagger and gave a laugh.

"Let me offer you my condolences on having missed Stair's reward by so narrow a chance. So *this* was what you meant when you said I should see your face again before I died. Before you go——"

"Do you not fear to let me go?"

"I should not dare to call myself a Stuart did I fear such as you."

He stooped, picked up the blade and held it to her.

"Here is your dagger, and here am I unarmed," he said, flinging back the silken robe so that she could see the beating of his heart stir the fine lawn shirt. "Now, strike if you will."

She snatched the dagger and threw it from her, then hid her face in her hands.

"I cannot; you know I cannot, because I love you!"

"Peace!" he said sternly. "Tell me the truth of the papers and then begone."

"Do you still believe I serve only for money?"

"I care nothing why you serve. Tell me the truth and go."

"You shall hear the truth. I did indeed serve Stair, but only, as I told you before, till I had seen you. Since then love and love alone has been my master. When you spurned me I fancied love was turned to hate, and came here vowed to kill you. But when I look on you I cannot."

"The papers, the papers!" he interrupted impatiently.

She flung herself suddenly at his feet, covered his hands with kisses and twined her arms about his knees.

"Love me, but once, one little hour of love, then kill me if you will! Let me teach you the love that you have never known and give you here and now an hour of happiness!"

He freed himself and recoiled so violently that she fell back against the bed-post and crouched there panting, and at that moment François knocked.

The King went to the door, seized Griset by the collar and stepped into the outer room, shutting the door behind him.

"Your Majesty," began François, "the landlord at the *Pluie d'Or* has just sent word that Mademoiselle Granby——"

"She is here," said the King.

"*Here,* Sire? They told me she had returned, supped with a man who rode in from Orange and went out again with her. She said she would be back in an hour or less and that the horses were to be ready."

"What was the friend like?"

"He was tall, masked, with a foreign accent, and rode a black horse with a white stocking."

"Ah, then I'll force the truth now and let her go."

"Let her go, Sire? 'Tis madness!"

"Silence, and bring in lights."

The King entered the bedroom, followed by François with two guttering candles. He stumbled against something and bent down over Louise Granby, who lay on the ground, with the hilt of the dagger under her left breast and a red stain on her green coat.

"Lift her on the bed," cried the King, "and staunch the wound!"

"On your bed, Sire?" exclaimed François in horror. "Let her lie where she is!"

Then, at a look from the King, he helped to lift her onto the bed and ripped cloth and lawn from the wound.

"She lives, Sire," he said at length; "but will not long. If I pull out the dagger 'tis the end."

"Will she speak before she dies? She must! She must!" said the King. Then a yet more pressing need came to him: "Monsieur l'Abbé! Fly and bring him while I watch."

He stood looking down at the hair that gleamed like fire about the pale face on the pillow, at the red stain that spread and spread on the satin coverlet, but the closed lids never lifted, nor did the white lips stir. The Abbé came in, half-asleep, a black cloak and his soutane hurriedly flung over his night attire, his bare feet thrust

into slippers, then the sight before him brought him full awake.

"Is she conscious? Do you know if she is a Catholic?"

"I know naught of her save that she was a spy of Stair's, came here to kill me, then said she could not."

The Abbé looked intently at the King, then laid his hand before Louise's lips.

"She still breathes. I can give her conditional absolution. Pray that she repented."

As he finished Louise's lids fluttered and she looked at James with a smile.

"The packet," he said, bending over her.

"Come closer," she breathed faintly. "I will tell you. The papers . . . stolen by . . ."

Then with a little shudder she died.

CHAPTER III

THE ROAD TO SPAIN

As Piero d'Este laid his aching head on the hard pillow at his inn he was conscious for the first time in his life of indecision. His first instinct had been to follow Lady Mary Gordon's coach to Avignon, masked and unobserved, then, when he had actually seen Margaret enter the Entraigues palace, to return without making his presence known to anyone; and so to continue on his way. But now reason told him that if Margaret followed his instructions, as she had promised to do, no ill could befall her or the papers till they were safely in the King's hands. It would mean another journey of forty miles for Roxane, the delay of another day or two, and the chance that he might be seen and followed by one of the many spies with which the Papal city swarmed, or even by one of the King's own followers, jealous of him and with nothing to do but gossip about small events. He tossed and turned, asking himself angrily what was the reason of such unwonted indecision. In all the years of his life he could not remember hesitation on his own part. He was incapable of the half-lights and blurred outlines with which subtler minds confuse issues; he had all the clear and constructive logic, the practical competence, directness of thought and action which had made the Romans the greatest of law-makers and empire-builders, so that Roman laws, roads, bridges, aqueducts and theatres still survived as the external

monuments of the only enduring form of western civilization.

Sleep came as dawn crept through the small lattice window, and it was with a heavy head and a bad temper that Piero came down the next morning to a breakfast of black bread and sour wine. Without event or excitement he followed the lumbering coach, saw Margaret go into the palace, then, masked and unnoticed, turned north again and rode a few miles along the Orange road to the *Trois Peupliers,* where he bade the landlord get Roxane a feed and himself some supper. He was scarcely inside when the storm broke, and as he sat down in his own room to the inevitable crayfish, followed by *ragoût de pieds de veau au céleri,* cherries and custard, the rain came down in torrents. The landlord himself came to clear away, and Piero raised his glass.

"To your health, *Monsieur le Propriétaire!* A most excellent supper, which I needed badly, and a very good wine."

"From mine own vineyard," bowed the man. *"Tiens!* since Monsieur knows a good wine, perhaps he will honour me by taking a bottle of the vintage which my father laid down."

He came back, wiping the dust and cobwebs from a fat green bottle, and at Piero's invitation shared the wine which, as he said, was sweet as love and strong as hate.

"I would not give my other guest a taste of that," he chuckled. "By St. Lazaire! I never saw a man in so ill a temper. True, he arrived after the storm had begun."

"He must have had a drenching then."

"He grumbled so that I grew angry and told him he had best go on to the *Buisson Vert;* then he told me he felt angry because important business had mis-

carried and that a friend who was to have met him had failed. He did not *say* so, but I fancy the friend was a woman."

"Doubtless that explains his ill-humour," said Piero, rising and stretching himself. *"Mon dieu!* But I am hot and dirty and dusty! The Romans were more civilized than we, since they had baths everywhere, and a man could bathe every day—twice, thrice, as often as he wished."

"The saints preserve us!" exclaimed the landlord, crossing himself: "No wonder their ghosts haunt the Pont du Garde and the castle at Orange! Here, if a man wished to bathe, he would have to go to the river."

"An idea!" exclaimed Piero, going to the window. "The storm is over, it is a beautiful evening and the moon will soon rise. The river runs at the foot of the garden? Then I will undress, put on a cloak, have a swim and wash off some of your famous Provençal dust."

"Parbleu! You will meet none. We shall all be in bed. It is an idea mad enough to be an Englishman's! Monsieur will be safe? The river is deep, the current swift and strong just here."

Piero laughed as he sat down and began to pull off his boots.

"I can swim like a fish. Never can I remember the time when I have not swum."

Then he put on his boots again.

"Dieu! I must see that my mare is all right. Will you bring a lantern?"

Roxane whinnied as Piero entered the stable, and took a piece of bread from his mouth.

"A beauty, and as gentle as a babe," said the landlord. "This is a fine horse, but not so good-tempered."

Piero put up a hand, but the black head jerked away sharply, as if its owner were little accustomed to caresses.

As Piero opened the garden-door he paused to listen. The landlord had said that all would be in bed, but he fancied he heard footsteps. Then he remembered his bad-tempered fellow-guest as he pulled the door to behind him. It was stiff, and gave a bang as he shut it. He looked rather ruefully at the purple cloak as he flung it on the bank. The adventure of the *chevaux-de-frise* had about finished the old friend. When he got to Madrid he must buy himself a new one. He stood for a moment with the moonlight gleaming on his brown body. He thought he heard the sound of the garden-door being shut again, but nothing stirred, and with a flight as swift and straight as an arrow's he dived into the Rhone. He rose to the surface with a little gasp, for after the breathless heat of the day, the water struck icy cold, swam vigorously upstream for a mile or so, then turned on his back and floated with the current.

Nothing was to be seen on either hand but banks of tall, green rushes, their feathery brown heads swaying in the little cool breeze, masses of loose-strife, its red-purple a dull grey in the moonlight, every now and then a willow with drooping red boughs whose silver leaves trailed in the water, or a poplar whose slender height soared into the clear sky. In the east one star shone large and golden below the soaring moon; everywhere was silence, clearness and cool, remote peace.

As he drifted with the swift silent river Piero felt as if his doubts and hesitations had been swept away as completely as the dust and sweat and weariness of the day. He experienced one of those moments when the splendour of physical health and strength thrills in perfect unison with vigour of mind and will—the sen-

sation which is perhaps the most perfect of all natural experiences.

It was with a sigh of regret that he recognized the three poplars in the inn garden, turned over and swam ashore. He scrambled up the steep bank, then, as he stooped to pick up his cloak, he saw on the ground the shadow of someone behind him, and slipped aside in a flash as a dagger buried itself in the ground through his cloak. Before he had time to straighten himself his assailant was at him with a sword; he caught him round the knees and sent him hurtling into the long grass. Then, as the man regained his feet, Piero recognized Alan Fraser and murderous fury rose in him. Naked and unarmed as he was, he resolved to kill. Swiftness and agility were his only chances against steel, and as he avoided a fierce lunge and flung himself sideways in an attempt to snatch the half-buried dagger, Fraser's heavy riding-boot came down on his arm, numbing it for the moment, while the blood began to trickle from the long cut made by the spur. As he expected the blade at his throat, Piero saw Fraser turn hurriedly, stoop and pick up a square white packet which had evidently dropped in his fall, and which he now thrust quickly into the breast of his coat. This gave Piero time to wrench the dagger from the ground, snatch up the cloak and whirl it round his left arm as a shield while he in his turn attacked. Neither had breath for speech; the only sounds were the stamping of Fraser's heavy boots, the pad of Piero's bare feet, their quick breathing, the clash of steel on steel. Once Piero only escaped by diving under Fraser's arm. The Scotsman tried to catch him, but his wet body was slippery as an eel's. The length of Fraser's reach with his sword gave him an advantage which Piero could only counter by extra agility and swiftness. Then he felt a burning at his

shoulder as the blade glanced over it, and before Fraser could draw back Piero leapt to kill with the dagger aimed at his heart. He felt it strike a rib and snap; once more he was defenceless. A sudden temptation came to him to fly—life and the King lay that way, and this way only nameless, useless death, but he cast the thought fiercely from him.

"A d'Este! A d'Este!" he cried as the Scotsman came at him, tried to tangle him in the cloak, which tore, then, as his sword was raised for the *coup-de-grâce,* Fraser's spur caught in a root. He staggered, toppled backwards; the overhanging bank crumbled with his weight and he fell with a great splash into the river. Piero leant over. The river ran swiftly, silently, the silver of its moonlit waters blurred only by the ripples of its own current. Something gleamed; Piero scrambled down and picked up the sword which Fraser had dropped as he had clutched at a bush in attempt to save himself. For a moment Piero hesitated, the sword balanced by its blade on his finger, then with a shrug of his shoulders he flung it behind him and plunged in. After swimming a hundred yards or so downstream, he gave up the search, landed, dropped the sword into the river, picked up the tattered cloak and ran in.

No one was stirring in the house, but a door opposite that into the garden stood ajar, so he peered in. A candle was burning low in its socket; a couple of saddle-bags lay on the bed, remains of supper on the table. It was evidently Fraser's room, so Piero stole in, shut the door, rifled the saddle-bags and searched the room. There was nothing except some clothes, a letter signed: "Your always devoted and most adoring Elsie." Piero ran an eye through its raptures, and flicked it contemptuously on to the table; it was too obviously genuine to be a cipher. Then, as he turned to go, a slip of paper

which he had overlooked fluttered to the ground and he pounced on it like a hawk, to find nothing but a few figures, evidently the canny Scot's notes of expenditure. The last item read: "June 12, *Pluie d'Or,* Avignon: dinner cost eleven livres, four sous, the landlord a most damnable, exorbitant villain."

Piero laughed to himself; then, as he dressed silently in his own room, he reflected that, since Fraser had dined in Avignon, left northward soon after, and arrived here in a bad temper because his business had gone wrong, it was obvious that he had been after the papers and knew that they had reached the King's hands safely in spite of all Stair's efforts.

Piero left a couple of louis on the table, crept down, carrying a candle and his boots and was lucky enough to find the stables unlocked.

"Tiens, Roxane!" he said as he saddled her; "I regret to disturb thee so soon, but we must be gone before that gentleman is missed. And this time no détours to throw spies off the scent, but a straight track south-east by Nîmes and Montpellier to the Spanish frontier."

Before he led out his mare he opened the door of the other stall.

"Of course, one white stocking! It was not my own wits that saved me this time. So my luck still holds."

He stood on the deserted road barred zebra-wise by the black shadows of poplars and cypresses cast across its white surface, and an impulse came to him to turn back to Avignon. He felt that deadly danger threatened the King and though reason told him that he had seen Margaret enter the palace and Fraser go to his doom in the river, yet every instinct urged him to return to the King as fast as Roxane could gallop. Then he fancied he heard James's voice gently mocking, as

in his last words: "You are fanciful as a woman, Piero."

"Dio mio! He was right. There is something the matter with me, Roxane. East for the frontier and Madrid!"

Abount sunrise he reached Uzès and put up for the day, and in the evening drew rein in the shade of a clump of ilexes on the north bank of the river Garde, which, low with drought, wound its way lazily among the stones at the bases of the piers supporting the Roman bridge and aqueduct. The low rays of the western sun shone down the valley, warming the Roman bricks to flame. Below Piero the piers stood solid and enduring as the rocks of the river-bed; above him the arches soared against the cloudless sky with a grandeur more inspiring than that of the distant mountains. For two thousand years they had stood here, and would probably stand for as long again, while empires and peoples, kings and republics rose, fell and were forgotten.

And pride rose in Piero that he was of the race of those who had made this straight white road for the tramp of military power and the travel of peaceful merchants, had built this mighty bridge and aqueduct to stand as symbol of the Latin genius which had stamped the old world indelibly with its own character of sanity, order and unity.

Roxane gave a little whinny, and Piero, hearing horses on the road from Uzès, drew out of sight behind the ilexes and threw his cloak over the mare's head. Two men were walking their mounts up the hill, and as they passed he heard their argument.

"You may be right," said one sulkily; "but if he had come this way we should have overtaken him by now. He rode to Orange, therefore he must be going to Paris."

"The Scotchman's orders to me yesterday at Avignon were to follow this way," answered the other. "If he rode to Spain we'll hear of him at Nimes."

"*L'Auberge du Louvres,* no doubt. None but the best inn for him. But if not?"

Piero heard no more, but this was enough, so, after giving them time to cross the bridge and get out of sight, he crossed too, and instead of the comfortable bed and good supper he had promised himself at the Louvres, he had to be content with a filthy inn on a cross-country road, where he managed with difficulty to get a couple of eggs, some olives and black bread.

In the next few days he covered the hundred odd miles through Montpelliers, Béziers and Narbonne without further adventure, and pausing short of Perpignan, stopped at a small inn near Rivesalta. After a decent supper and a bottle of local wine which justified its reputation as one of the best in France, Piero rose and stretched himself, feeling at peace with the world, in spite of physical fatigue and a face burnt almost black by the midsummer sun, for to-morrow, if all went well, he would be over the Spanish frontier. He wondered if there were any possibility of bathing in the famous stream which sprang full-grown from the rock like Athena from the head of Zeus; but before he had time to ask the landlord the man began, in a mixture of Catalan and Provençal very difficult to understand, to apologize for the fact that another traveller who had just arrived must share this room for supper, bed and breakfast.

Piero's brows came down in a frown, and instinctively his hand went to his sword, for already the landlord had opened the door to admit the stranger. Piero, hurriedly putting on his mask, determined to slip out and push on to Perpignan, a prospect which annoyed him, for Roxane had already done enough that day. He stood

aside as the new arrival, tall and plainly dressed in black, limped into the room with a bow and a courtly apology for his intrusion; then Piero, with a cry of pleasure, pulled off his mask and held out his hand to Père de St. Etienne.

"But what are you doing, *mon père,* in such a remote spot?"

"That is easily explained, Prince. I was given a holiday which enabled me at last to fulfil a vow made long ago in China to undertake a pilgrimage to the shine of Sant'Iago at Compostella. Then I visited Manresa, and am now by easy stages on my way to Avignon. And you?"

When the barefooted maid had banged the priest's food and drink on the table and gone Piero made a grimace.

"*Diable!* She's as ugly as sin, that one, and stinks like the devil. For me, I ride on the King's business."

"That goes almost without saying," smiled the other as he began his supper. "Tell me the news from Avignon."

"I am glad you are going there, *mon père.* The King is lonely."

"Till you return?"

Piero shrugged his shoulders, then sat down facing the Jesuit, his chin cupped in his hands.

"I had a queer feeling when I left him that this was the end."

"A presentiment that you would not meet again?"

"Not quite that; rather that when we did meet again things would be different."

"That sense of the transience of all human affections comes like the stroke of a sword when one has not realized it before. It is a lesson we all have to learn—you later than the King."

"He comes before any other with me as he has always done, but with him——"

Piero lifted troubled eyes to the steady grey ones.

"With him," continued Père de St. Etienne quietly, "you know that there is a greater, more binding allegiance than the closest of human friendships."

"He is a saint, *mon père*. That is the only thing there has ever been between us. I can scarcely fancy him capable of a deliberate fault—of folly perhaps, in that he cares too little for himself, is too forgiving, too generous with those who betray him."

"Folly, perhaps, but surely divine folly to forgive his enemies. Generous he most certainly is, both naturally and supernaturally. He has the qualities which distinguish those souls whom God destines to great sanctity—a nobility of thought and feeling incapable of base or mean action, and a tenderness of heart which makes them feel the suffering of others so deeply that they will deprive themselves of all to help sufferers."

"The King will certainly never learn to keep enough for his own needs while any of his followers are in want. Is that not more than enough?"

"Do you remember what St. Gregory says? That it is easy to give up what we *have,* but how hard to renounce what we *are*. If we would be generous to God we must be prepared to give Him all that we are—ourselves, our hearts, minds, wills, life itself."

"That is too hard for ordinary men, yet I can fancy the King doing it. But the generosity and courage you talk of, surely they are the special virtues of noble blood."

"'To give and not count the cost'," said Père de St. Etienne. "'To fight and not heed the wounds.' But what is the motive?"

Piero laughed.

"Surely you, as a Frenchman, would reply: *"Noblesse oblige."*

"Is that what matters most to you, *mon Prince?"*

Piero threw up his head.

"Certainly I am proud to be of princely blood, and heir to noble traditions and great possessions. So should the King be. Have we two not the same blood?"

He paused; there was a third who shared the same high heritage, Margaret Ogilvie, who had called herself his friend.

"Tell me of Spain, *mon père*," he said abruptly. "With you I need make no secret of my mission. It is to persuade King Philip to declare himself openly in favour of the Cause and to obtain the five thousand Irish troops needed for the invasion of England."

"To persuade the *King?"* asked the Jesuit drily. "You are certainly the best agent for that, since your home is not far from the Queen's."

"Elizabeth Farnese is a strange and clever woman."

"A type you do not like, Prince, judging from your tone."

"But no, to see a man in the hands, under the thumb of his wife, it revolts me. The husband should be master."

"As you doubtless will be."

"If I were ever to marry, *mon père*, I promise you that I will play Philip V to no woman alive."

"You knew the Queen before she married?"

"No, I have been little at Modena, but I was in Spain this spring when we returned from Scotland, to endeavour to gain Alberoni's support."

"The Cardinal is far-sighted. His intrigues embrace the whole of Europe."

"We are of use in the Spanish plans," said Piero eagerly. "Now that the French Regent is allied with

the English Government and the Elector of Hanover it is to Philip's interest, if he wishes to succeed the present French king, to see James on the English throne, a friendly and Catholic ruler. Therefore one of the points I am to press is the release of the Irish troops."

"Those who were exiled with Sarsfield after the siege of Limerick?"

"The King thinks he will have a stronger case to put before Admiral Baker to enlist his support if he has the Spanish promise to embark these troops at Corunna. Also he waits important papers from England to complete plans for the rising, but I think these are now safely in his hands."

Piero told briefly his rescue of Margaret; how he had seen her safe to the palace, and of his fight with Fraser.

"Explain me this, *mon père*," he ended with a laugh, "since it is your *métier* to analyse motives. I fought to kill, with hate and murder in my heart, and yet when the Scot fell into the river I went in after him."

"With the deliberate intention of saving his life?"

"Rather on a Quixotic impulse of the moment. My deliberate intention for months had been quite the contrary —to kill when the chance occurred."

"Then all this time you were a murderer at heart?"

Piero shrugged his shoulders again.

"That is not a pretty way of putting it."

"Is murder pretty?"

"*Dio mio!* Don't you understand that I hate him because he is the King's enemy?"

"*That* the King would not approve."

Piero shifted uneasily on his hard chair.

"No; when I told him I hated one who had done him an ill service, he said that no true love could generate hate."

"You have courage as well as honesty, *mon Prince*, to confess that. And the other virtue we spoke of, generosity, will you not show that too?"

"How so?"

"You ride alone on a dangerous mission. Evil may befall you—wounds, treachery, even death."

"Che sara, sara."

"Will you ride, then, with the ugliness of hate and murder in your heart?"

Piero looked up sulkily, with a frown, but Père de St. Etienne smiled at him very winningly.

"Will you not be generous as well as courageous, like the King, my son?"

And Piero smiled back at him.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROMAN BRIDGE

It was soon after midday when the stag was killed at Vaucluse and the hunt began to turn homewards. Pietro Doni, a younger brother of Donna Julia's, pointed his whip up a narrow lane.

"That way is the chateau of the old Scotch Miladi," he said to the King: "a funny one, it appears! She occupies herself with vines, mulberries, silk-worms, olives; but, more interesting, one hears she has a beautiful niece."

The King pulled up Sancho in the shade of an oak and sat a minute flicking his boot with his whip, then he looked solemnly at Pietro.

"I am deeply interested in agriculture," he said; "the manuring of vines is dear to my heart, but for the breeding of silk-worms I have a veritable passion."

"Your Majesty should not go alone."

"I have François."

"Not enough security."

The King smiled at him.

"Grant me a little half-holiday, *mon cher*. That so stern Swiss of the legate's always on guard makes me feel like a naughty schoolboy."

Pietro gave a shrug of protest, but capitulated to the smile, as was inevitable, and a few moments later the King was jogging along the shady lane. It turned sharply to the left and beyond a wide upward sweep of pasture he saw the chateau, the steep roofs of its round towers glowing in the sunshine against a dark background of

chestnuts. There was an angry roar and the sound of frightened voices and the King, standing up in his stirrups, saw over the hedge a bull advancing to a corner of a field, pausing every now and then to bellow at two women huddled under a tree.

"Hold Griset!" he cried, setting Sancho at the hedge.

The bull turned its attention to the new intruder, and the King, pulling his scarlet cloak from his saddle-bow, trailed it on the grass as he cantered away.

The bull lumbered after him, and half-way down the field, James, seeing that the women had scrambled to safety with François' help, jumped into the lane, rode back to them and dismounted. He took off his mask and bowed.

"You have had a narrow escape, Lady Mary Gordon. May I see that you reach home in safety now?"

"I shall be even more grateful than already for your kindness. But you have the advantage of me, Monsieur, for you know my name while I——"

"Aunt Mary," said Margaret, "it is the King."

"Perhaps Lady Mary would prefer to say the Pretender," smiled the King.

"Since you are incognito, may I say *Monsieur le Chevalier de St. Georges?*" asked Lady Mary, smiling in return.

She was only too glad to accept his arm; with Margaret on her other side they set out towards the chateau, and by the time it was reached the conquest of the old lady was complete. She was standing with the King in the hall as Margaret came down the wide stairs, and she watched his intent gaze.

"You have met my niece before?" she asked abruptly.

"In Scotland," he answered, his eyes meeting hers steadily; "and in Paris."

"Are you not coming to Avignon?" he asked towards the end of dinner.

"The Prince d'Auvergne is lending Jules and Clarice de Sarci his house," said Lady Mary; "so perhaps my niece may make a stay with them. I hear you are very gay there."

"Many of my followers are young, Lady Mary. When one is young it is the time to be happy, if life will let one. Do you not agree, Mademoiselle?"

When dinner was finished the old lady held out her hand.

"If you would care to visit Petrarch's waterfall, *Monsieur le Chevalier*, my niece knows the way. If you will forgive me I shall rest. My fright has not made me feel younger. I am more than grateful to you."

James raised the wrinkled hand to his lips.

"The gratitude is due from me, for you have given a homeless exile a delightful glimpse of home."

"Puir laddie!" she murmured; then gave her dry little laugh: "You have gained a friend, Monsieur, though not an adherent. My Whig principles are too deep-rooted."

"One friend is worth many followers. So I may say *au revoir?*"

As the King and Margaret set out up a narrow shady path he looked down at her and pointed to the bunch of orange roses she wore in the lace at the breast of her green silk dress.

"Your roses, Mistress Ogilvie, are of the wrong colour."

"They belie my heart, Sire, for next my heart——" she broke off and blushed.

"Next your heart?"

"I wear what was once next yours," she whispered.

They had reached a glade where the path curved round a clear pool, with a view across the pastures and vineyards south-east to the Rhone and the distant roofs of Avignon.

"Look, Sire, what a view; one can see the Papal palace and the cathedral clearly."

"That interests me not at all," he said, looking at her. "I see them every day and grow weary of them. But this riddle of your heart?"

She pulled the locket from her breast, shattering one of the orange roses. He picked up the petals and flung them into the water, where they floated like a golden fairy argosy. Then he took the locket from her and looked at the half-charred scrap of green silk and ivory lace.

She leant towards him, as if she would print his picture for ever on her memory. His coat of russet-brown opened over the lawn shirt; his curling lashes cast a dark shadow on the olive skin, clear and soft as a woman's; the delicate nostrils quivered, the red mouth drooped a little. The silence was broken only by the trickle of water over the stones, the sleepy note of a bird. Margaret was acutely conscious of physical sensations—his slender, sensitive beauty, with its air of cool remoteness and fine breeding, the languorous heat of the southern sun soaking through the thin silk of her dress, the quickness of her breath, the throbbing of her heart. In a flash she lived again that supreme moment of her life when she had lain in those strong arms at dawn, with lips on hers that seemed to draw forth her very soul in a flame of ecstasy.

The King's eyes met hers—dark, shadowed, tragic—as he handed back the locket.

"It is perhaps a symbol of my Cause, a work of love and care and beauty destined only to decay and destruction, to be burned, trodden underfoot and forgotten."

As she slipped it back into her breast he saw that her eyes had filled with tears.

"Do not weep for me. It is enough that the shadow of my race should fall on me without darkening the lives of those I would fain call my friends."

She did not speak, but her tears brimmed over and fell.

"Are we not friends?" he asked gently.

"Sire, I have vowed myself to your service, promised to sacrifice all else, all other and myself to loyalty to your Cause."

"Pray God such sacrifice may not be required of you. Do you know why I am here?"

She shook her head.

"Those papers you brought from Paris at risk of your life and delivered to me——"

A cry escaped her.

"They were the originals. The packet never left my person from the moment Monsieur de Sarci gave it to me till I gave them into your hands."

"Shall we walk on? We are less likely to be overheard. Alas! that one has grown so accustomed to treachery that even here one fears spies."

As they went on he told her of the loss of the papers and of the secrecy necessary to save her honour, and when they reached the waterfall she turned with hands clasped.

"Sire, Sire, let no consideration for me tie your hands! My comfort, safety, even my good name weigh naught in the balance against your needs."

"That is what I should expect you to say. In any case, no step can be taken before the Prince of Este returns. Meantime I shall strain every nerve, exert every effort, shrink from no risk to regain them."

"Sire, I do entreat you, as would all your faithful followers, to guard yourself. You matter more than all else, for on you all our hopes depend."

"Did you mark my words to Lady Mary, that one friend is worth many followers? May I not call you friend?"

Her dark grey eyes met his liquid hazel ones steadily, though the colour flooded her face.

"If I could call myself worthy, she whispered.

He looked away to where the foam rose, fine as lace, from the ever-falling water.

"To be a king is lonely," he said. "How much more when he is an exile and a failure—only a king of shadows —does he need the help of friendship."

He raised her hand to his lips, then turned.

"If I am not back before dusk they will think that Stair has kidnapped me, if nothing worse."

Two or three miles south of *les Trois Peupliers* James and François saw the black figure of a man trudging wearily towards them in the distance. He walked along the straight white road with bent head, and did not even look up at the sound of horses' hoofs till the King pulled up beside him.

"Good evening, Monsieur; it goes better? You are still on holiday."

The student looked up startled, and the look in his eyes reminded the King of the stag's gaze as it had felt the knife at its throat.

"Yes, Monseigneur," he stammered, "Monsignor Salviati thought the country would do me good, so I am going on a little visit to my father's brother, Jean Roche, who has a small farm beside the river here."

"If the wine we have just drunk at *les Peupliers* is from his vineyards, I make him my congratulations and envy you. But I forgot, you do not drink."

A dull flush crept into Luc Roche's haggard face; he looked down, and his thin hands twisted themselves nervously together.

"Monseigneur, I beg of you to forgive me that discourtesy. If I could explain——"

"I but jested, Monsieur; think no more of it. Did you tell me where your mother lived?"

"In the last house in the Rue des Cordeliers. She is poor. My father had a little shop; they were happy and comfortable, but one he thought his friend ruined him and he died. My mother is the best in the world, and I would do anything in the world for her sake. But I delay you."

The King laid a hand on Sancho's neck to stop his fidgeting; then he held it out.

"*Au revoir, Monsieur.* Shall I pray for you?"

Luc looked at the outstretched hand, smooth and brown, with the great diamond burning on it; then, with one hurried glance at the King's eyes, clear and full of pity, he hid his face in his hands, turned away and stumbled blindly along the Orange road.

"*Tiens,* Sire," grinned François as they resumed their homeward way. "*Un drôle de garçon ca!* He will surely make a queer priest, for he appears to me more than a little mad already."

2

It was one evening in late July that the King with Pietro Doni and half a dozen of the younger members of his court dismounted at the Auvergne palace and were shown out into the garden, where Clarice de Sarci, Julia Doni and Margaret were sitting under a huge cedar whose boughs were supported by a circle of marble nymphs.

"You are as exquisitely refreshing as a flower," said the King to Clarice, whose fair hair gleamed golden as the heart of a rose above her pink gown turned back from a petticoat of palest green. "One is so overwhelmed with the heat that one asks nothing but coolness."

"Is that a desirable quality in a woman, Sire?" she laughed.

"In my eyes," he answered, as he looked down into Julia's eyes, warm and slumberous as deep pools. "You, Madonna, bloom but the fairer for the heat, since you are of the south."

"As is your Majesty on your mother's side," she answered.

"Also Mistress Ogilvie," and he held his hand to her.

As she rose from her curtsey her eyes met his, and in them she saw no longer the shadows that had darkened them in the wood at Vaucluse, but an excitement that set gleams of green and yellow a-dance in the red hazel.

His gaiety was infectious; the cool shade of the cedar rang with the laughter and jests of the three women and his followers; outside the afternoon sun still blazed with fiery heat on white marble paths and steps, on scorched grass, fading lilies and dropping roses. Just beyond the shadow a fountain filled the air with spray and the pleasant sound of falling water which trickled over the edge of the basin and made its way along a little fern-fringed stream to the Rhone. In the centre, half revealed, half veiled by the blown spray, was the life-sized statue of a Greek athlete, lightly poised as if ready to take flight from the heavy earth.

"Does the statue not remind you of someone, Sire?" asked Clarice.

It was Margaret who answered.

"Yes, an extraordinary likeness to the Prince of Este."

Julia spoke to the King, and Margaret stood looking at the bronze surface shining with falling water, at the broad-shouldered, lean-flanked beauty and strength of the body, every line in proportion, every muscle in training.

"Why waste those lovely eyes on lifeless bronze?" laughed Pietro Doni.

"Why indeed," she laughed in reply, "When there are eyes as beautiful as your sister's to look at?"

They stood side by side at the end of the garden, watching the river running down to the ruined bridge with the chapel of St. Bénézet.

"You are staying all the summer?" he asked.

"I cannot leave my aunt for so long. Besides, the Prince d'Auvergne is bringing his bride here."

"Then we must find another house for you and Mademoiselle de Sarci. The King is going! What atrocious ill-fortune!"

She managed to get a word with the King as they went up the garden.

"You remember, Sire, you asked me about a few things for a poor woman. I have some dresses and cloaks of Aunt Mary's."

"A thousand thanks. If you could send them to Madame Roche, the last house in the Rue des Cordeliers. I visited her one day, one little dark airless room, but of a cleanness the most perfect."

He looked round to see they were not overheard.

"Good news!" he whispered, eager, happy, boyish; "I hope that before dawn the lost may be found."

"Good luck, Sire! and all success be with you."

When the guests had gone Clarice confessed to a blinding headache, and filled with remorse at her own self-absorption, Margaret put a strong arm round the shoulders whose thinness was so skilfully hidden by soft folds of silk and lace.

"Chérie," she said as they went into the house, "I am selfish. I should have seen you were tired. You must rest till to-morrow."

"How will you amuse yourself?" asked Clarice, leaning her head against Margaret's shoulder. "I do not know when Jules will be back. You should have gone home with Donna Julia."

"I do not care so much for that one. She is beautiful but——"

"You prefer Pietro's looks?" teased Clarice. "The poor boy adores you."

"A charming child who amuses me. But you are lovelier than any."

"I am of a thinness which is entirely displeasing."

Margaret looked down at her in the low sun-rays, the blue veins of the temples under the spun-gold hair, the brilliant carmine that alternated so swiftly with deadly pallor on the thin face, the dark-lashed eyes transparent as sea-water, a beauty so ethereal, so evanescent as to be no longer earthly. She took Clarice in her arms and held her almost fiercely.

"If anything were to happen to you," she murmured, "I could not bear it. You are the first and only woman I have completely loved and now without your friendship I should be lost."

"The first *woman?*" mocked Clarice gently. "But how many *men?*"

Margaret laid her cheek against the scented hair and looked out of the window in silence. The south wind had risen as the sun went down and blew in hot gusts, sending clouds of white dust whirling along the hot streets and flinging the spray from the athlete so that his naked body gleamed in the sunshine. Polished metal—memory caught Margaret back to that frozen snow-bound Sabbath, the firelight dancing on the shining darkness of Piero's hair and the smooth sweep of jaw and cheek. She had thought then of the smoothness and hardness of pol-

ished metal, the warm gleam of bronze, the quick flicker of steel—bright, keen, supple yet unbreakable. She gave a little sigh, then Clarice took her face between her hands and kissed her.

"May he be worthy and the sun shine on you," she smiled.

Marie was laying out the dress of green and silver when Margaret came into the room, and a sudden resolution framed itself.

"Marie, will you come with me if I take those few things of Miladi's to Madame Roche? It is too hot to sit still. Have I anything that would be of use to the poor woman?"

"But certainly," cried Marie joyously. "The things Mademoiselle brought with her from Scotland, so quiet, so *démodés,* more fit for an old woman!"

She dived eagerly into cupboards and trunks, and soon the bed was covered with clothes. Margaret picked up the plain, strong nightdresses, shifts, petticoats and gowns of linen and wool, for which she and Elsie had spun and carded the flax and wool, and which they had made with such fine careful stitching under old Janet's critical eye.

"I shall want them when I go back to Scotland," she said, laying her cheek against the cool smoothness of linen.

"*Ma foi!* Mademoiselle will never return to that so sad, cold, foggy country. She is of the south. Here in Provence her beauty expands itself as a flower opens in the sunshine."

"Little flatterer!" laughed Margaret, as she gathered an armful and threw it onto a chair. "Let them go then—cloaks and dresses too."

She picked up one dress of sober grey homespun with

its plain collar and cuffs of linen and stood smoothing out its folds while Marie began to pack the bundle for Madame Roche.

"Clothes are strange things, Marie," she said meditatively. "Something more than mere covering to our nakedness or warmth for our bodies."

"But assuredly, Mademoiselle; they are to reveal our beauties, to conceal those we have not, to express a mood, stimulate admiration and—who knows?—perhaps to kindle love."

"You have forgotten one thing—memory. A woman remembers the dress she was wearing as one of the essentials in those few moments of life which she will never forget."

Marie put in the last cloak and sat back on her heels.

"That grey dress, Mademoiselle?"

"Is a memory, so it returns to the wardrobe," answered her mistress: "Do you know the Rue des Cordeliers?"

"No, Mademoiselle, but Jean will know," replied Marie with a blush; "he has been in Avignon before."

Margaret smiled, remembering that she had seen Marie and a good-looking young man in the d'Auvergne livery with their heads very close together in the garden.

So Jean and Marie gossiped happily outside while Margaret took the bundle, followed Madame Roche into the tiny room, and explained that the King had asked her for a few things which might be useful. At mention of the King Madame's stern face and keen eyes softened.

"He has been here a couple of times," she said; "he came first to find out if he could help Luc, my son, who has been ill. I would accept nothing for myself, you understand; but to be able to give Luc a few pleasures, it is my dream."

"He is lucky to have so devoted a mother."

"I am lucky, Mademoiselle, to have so good a son. He has cared for none but me; he would sacrifice himself to please me; and if the good God will let me live long enough to hear Luc say his first Mass, I shall indeed die happy."

"He will be happy too."

A shadow came over the old face.

"I fancy he is not happy at the moment. There seems something on his mind, but I can believe nothing bad; he has always been so good a son."

"I have seen students like that in Scotland. They learn and learn till they can no longer see clearly nor know what to do."

"Mademoiselle is Scotch, and perhaps not Catholic? I will pray for her as I do every day for the King, though I think he does not much need it. He is a saint. Mademoiselle cannot wait a little? I am expecting Luc home from a visit to his uncle."

As Margaret finished her solitary supper under the cedar Marie came tripping across the grass.

"There is a young man to see you, Mademoiselle. He will not give his name, but he is very distraught. Jean thinks he is a little mad."

"What is he like?"

"Pale and thin, with big black eyes, and though it is so hot he wears a brown cloak."

"I will see him in the hall. Jean can remain within call."

The brown cloak swung open as its wearer turned sharply at the sound of high heels, and Margaret saw the dusty soutane tucked up under it.

"Monsieur Roche, is it not?" she asked, sitting down by the window. "I saw you in the ante-room of the Entraigues palace about a month ago."

He licked his parched lips and looked round as if afraid of being spied on.

"Mademoiselle, it is to save the King that I am here."

"What threatens him? And why have you come to me?"

"My mother told me that you were in the King's confidence, that he had sent you to her, and she saw that your servant wore the d'Auvergne livery."

She rose quickly.

"What new peril threatens the King and when?"

"To-night, at the Pont du Garde, three hours after sunset."

"*Mon dieu!* It is near sunset now. Quick! Quick!"

Then doubt sprang into her mind. Was this a trap?

"What should the King be doing at the Pont du Garde near midnight?"

"He rode out on his way there an hour ago—alone but for his valet—to recover the stolen packet of papers from England."

"What do you know of the papers?"

"I stole them. That day you were there they were left on the table, because the King took the wrong packet when he went out with Monsignor Salviati. I took the real packet as I followed with the Abbé."

"*You* took it? And is it you who have now baited this trap for the King?"

"I took it, for money—yes," he said, looking her straight in the face for the first time; "for my mother's sake, not thinking I was doing wrong, because that Scot in Paris told me the King was wicked and his restoration must at all costs be prevented. I brought the note to the King to-day, doubting, and when I saw my mother I knew I was a murderer. But we waste time."

"Jean! Jean!" called Margaret frantically, "saddle me a horse and bring it round at once! Will you come to the Entraigues palace, Monsieur?"

As she clattered through the evening traffic of the stifling, dusty streets, Margaret asked herself what she was to do if the King had really gone. Secrecy was essential, for none must know of the loss of the papers who did not know already. Jules de Sarci was away —none knew where—but she fancied he was in Paris attempting to find out if the papers had yet reached Stair's hands. And Piero, to whom her thought had instinctively turned as the one sure hope, was in Spain. Remained Père de St. Etienne, whom she had seen once or twice since his arrival a month ago.

On being told at the palace that the King had ridden out with François an hour or more ago, she asked for the Jesuit, and while waiting for the return of the man who had gone to fetch him she stood at the window of the great hall, looking out almost mad with anxiety and impatience. The majordomo came in to say that Père de St. Etienne had also gone out; he fancied to pay his respects to the legate, but he was not sure.

"A pen and ink; and will you see that the note is delivered to Père de St. Etienne immediately on his return? It is of vital urgency."

She scribbled a few words, saying she would herself ride to the Pont du Garde, and begging the Jesuit to detain Luc Roche; then, as she handed the note to the slightly ruffled official and went downstairs, a feeling of utter helplessness came over her. If she rode alone, not even knowing the way, how could she arrive in time? Was it not better to disregard the King's command to secrecy and make his peril known? But to whom? Pietro Doni? A mere boy. The Duke of Mar? She disliked and distrusted him.

As she approached the open door she heard the sound of hoofs, and when she signalled with her whip to the man who held her horse she saw a rider dismount at the

foot of the steps. He was white with dust from head to foot, but she saw Roxane and knew that it was Piero. He drew back as she ran towards him hands outstretched, but before he could speak she had a hand on his arm, and whispered breathlessly:

"The King is in deadly peril at the Pont du Garde, three hours after sunset, and it has already long set. Secrecy is imperative because of the lost papers."

He turned and called to the groom who was leading away Roxane.

"Another horse, saddled and round at once! Roxane is done, Mademoiselle. I pushed on over forty miles to-day to get back, and your horse, if I took him, would not carry me."

She looked at him with a little laugh.

"No, Prince, for the excellent reason that he must carry me. I ride with you. Think you I can stay here and let you go into the King's danger while I do naught?"

"True, we are of the same blood. *Diable!* They are long with that horse, and I must have a drink before we go."

"I can tell you all I know as we ride."

She had already mounted when they brought out a tall silver cup of wine, and he raised it to her before he drained it, vaulted into the saddle and set off with her at a canter.

That ride through the long summer evening and the deepening twilight was always to remain for Margaret one of life's most exquisite and vital moments. Once outside the city walls, they settled down to a steady pace along the straight white road towards the golden glory of the sunset sky, and Margaret told the story of the papers, their theft and Luc Roche's belated repentance. Piero interrupted occasionally with a question and at the end exclaimed:

"Alan Fraser, he was in it all! It must have been he who received the stolen papers and was on his way to Paris with them when we met. He dropped a packet when we were fighting and stopped to recover it instead of running me through when he had me at his mercy. That was why!"

"Then the papers have served one good turn, whatever their past and future."

The horses were walking up a long hill, and he pulled his grey in towards her chestnut till his dusty boot brushed the skirt of her habit.

"You are glad then that I am still alive?"

"Are *you* not glad?"

"You have not answered my question."

"Of course I am glad."

"Why?"

"Is this a catechism?"

"Why?" he repeated, and her eyes fell before his.

"Because now you ride to save the King."

"Is that your only reason?"

"Is it not enough?"

"One asks more than a bare sufficiency."

"I am also glad because, but for you, I should ride alone."

"And any companion was welcome?"

"And because you are my friend," she said as they reached the brow of the hill, and for an instant her hand touched his arm before she set her horse again to a canter.

A silence fell between them, silence that needed no words. To both, the danger of the King and the mission on which they rode was like the lowering background of a thunder-cloud which throws into stronger relief the rainbow colours of a sunlit landscape. Each was acutely conscious of external things—the long, slow fading of the sunset glow, the paling of the western sky from apricot to

apple-green pricked with one low steady star. The south wind had fallen and the air grew cool and fresh as twilight stole over the country, blurring the outlines of twisted olives, heavy-leaved mulberries, the neat rows of vines, the orchards of pear and peach, plum and cherry trees. Then the sleepy notes of the last bird sank into a silence broken only by the occasional hooting of an owl, the harsh cry of a corncrake, or the loud chorus of croaking bullfrogs in a half-dried pond. It was as though time had ceased to be; an hour stretched to eternity, yet passed with the trembling sigh of one quick breath.

Piero spoke.

"Over the next hill is the Pont du Garde. I passed it on my way to Spain, and this side of the valley is a little wood where you can wait. I will leave my horse with you."

He drew back the low branches of some oaks for her to enter a space completely hidden from the road, then he dismounted, hitched his rein over a bough and turned to go.

"Wait, I am coming too," she said, slipping from her saddle.

He frowned.

"I prefer you to remain here. You are armed?"

"No."

"I have a spare dagger. No, *diavolo!* I forgot. This is not my own saddle."

"No matter. I could not anyhow use pistol or dagger."

"Then why wish to come? If we are in time there will be ugly work, fit for no woman's eyes."

"If not?"

"Uglier still. We endanger the King's life by this delay. I go. You must do as you will. I cannot force you to stay here, but this is not woman's work."

He pushed through the boughs and vanished down the hill. She stood listening to the sound of the horses

munching the short sweet grass under the trees and the faint trickle of water where the river wound lazily along its stony bed. The topmost tier of arches soared black against the clear pale sky; the line of road gleamed white. All seemed silent and deserted.

Panic seized her. She dared no longer remain alone where earth and air and water were alive with hidden enemies, with alien ghosts. Yet she had dared to fancy she could ride alone to save the King. The King! Suddenly she realized that all her thoughts during the ride had been for Piero, that during this magic hour he had blotted out past and future, memory and hope—and even now they might be too late. The King might be lying cold and stiff on the bridge, or worse, far worse, a broken, mangled body at the base of one of those mighty piers.

She ran down the hill as quietly as she could and reached the first arch. Nothing was to be heard except the faint lapping of the water far below. She crouched against the bricks, still hot from the sun, then, on the other side of the arch, she heard someone breathing. An owl hooted three times and a man stepped out from a further arch, masked, with drawn sword.

"I am here," came the King's voice, low but clear. "Will you give me the numbers."

A voice from the shadows read out an apparently meaningless list of figures, and the King spoke again.

"You have them, for the cipher corresponds. What are your terms?"

"You may see them if you wish to make sure," said the voice, and the King advanced. His rapier was ready and as the other's blade flashed he parried and stepped back to draw the other into the open. There was a sharp word of command and three more men came at the King as François ran towards him. But before he reached him there was a shout: "A d'Este! A d'Este!" and Piero

fell like a cat on his feet in the middle of the mêlée, surprise and fright at his sudden appearance startling the enemy so much that they drew back, giving the King and Piero time to get shoulder to shoulder with their backs against an arch.

An angry order was rapped out in a voice which Margaret recognized as Fraser's. So did Piero.

"Ah, *Monsieur l'Ecossais,* welcome from the dead to settle that old debt!" he cried, and attacked just in time to divert Fraser's point from the heart of the King, who was busy with two other assailants. François now took on one of them while Piero went for Fraser with a rush that took him back from the King to the centre of the bridge. The fourth man had disappeared. There was no sound but the stamping of feet, quick breathing and the ring of steel on steel. Then François gave a cry; his sword slipped from his hand and he fell back against the parapet, which began to crumble. The cry diverted the King's attention and gave his overmatched adversary a chance which he took quickly. His thrust, however, glanced off the King's shoulder as he stooped and the blade snapped against a stone of the arch behind him. In a flash the King's rapier was through his sword-arm, putting him out of action, and he turned and ran, leaving a trail of blood behind him, towards the northern bank.

Meantime Margaret had rushed to François, and seizing him by his unwounded arm and shoulder dragged him to safety as the parapet he had fallen against subsided and fell with a splash into the river hundreds of feet below. At the same moment Fraser, stepping back to disengage, stumbled over François' prostrate body and fell back hitting his head with a thud against the base of an arch. He did not stir, and there was a feeble chuckle from the recovering François, while Piero bound his blade with that of François' late opponent and forced him

back to the middle of the bridge. Margaret rose from her knees while the King bent over Fraser to lay a hand on his heart and was just in time to knock up a pistol aimed point-blank at the back of the King's head by the fourth man who had been hidden. Almost at the same moment he struck with the dagger in his left hand at the King's left shoulder, but with both her hands she managed to wrench the dagger away and drove it with all her force into his right upper arm and with one glance at Fraser's form, he too began to run to safety.

The King straightened himself, and at sight of Margaret he gave an exclamation of amazement; then a cry from Piero made them both turn. He, after a time-thrust in opposition from his adversary—the best swordsman of the four—attacked so fiercely that the man's backward step brought his heel against a loose stone of the broken parapet and even as Piero shouted a warning he went backwards, seized at the edge to save himself and fell over, the stone crumbling with his weight. There was a second's silence, broken by a sickening sound as his skull smashed against the pier, a thud as the body slipped from stonework to rock and a splash.

Piero drew out a handkerchief, wiped his blade and sheathed it, then he touched Fraser lightly with his foot.

"Dead?"

"No," answered the King; "his heart still beats."

Piero knelt, thrust his hand inside Fraser's coat, drew out a packet and handed it to the King, who took it and opened it without a word. There was a breathless silence as he turned over the contents; then he slipped them back into their cover, and put them into the breast of his own coat.

"All are there," he said very quietly. "The covering is a little damaged with wet, but the papers are safe."

The moon had just topped the eastern hill and shone

onto his pale face and the smile which transfigured it with a wonderful radiance.

"The papers are safe," he repeated, "thanks to you two, my friends."

And he held out a hand to each.

CHAPTER V

HALCYON DAYS

François soon recovered enough to examine Fraser.

"There is a newly-healed wound in his head, but no other. He must have knocked his head as he fell."

"Can we get him back to Avignon?"

"Impossible, unless your Majesty wishes to kill him."

"There is a small inn just over the bridge on the Uzès road," said Piero.

"Excellent," answered the King. "Get our horses, François. We'll hoist him onto your old grey; it is the quietest."

Piero strode off to fetch his horse and Margaret's, leaving her and the King standing by Fraser.

"Look, Mademoiselle," he said, "under the waning moon the sky is already lightening towards dawn."

"May it prove a true omen, Sire, and may this night be the first step towards the rising of your sun."

"I shall owe it to you—you and Piero."

"The little I have done is nothing beside my desire to serve you."

"I need no more assurance of your loyalty and generosity than of your friendship."

"Sire," she answered in a low voice, "rest assured that my loyalty and devotion are yours till death—and beyond, if there be one."

"There is indeed," he answered gravely; "if not, we were of all men the most miserable."

A clatter of hoofs heralded the return of the horses; Piero and François hoisted the limp form onto François' grey, while the King and Margaret rode on.

It was a matter of some moments to rouse the innkeeper, who appeared cross and blinking, but the King's charm, aided by the sight of a purse of louis, soon melted him, and he bustled off to wake his wife and prepare a bed for Fraser and breakfast for the rest. Sancho was cropping the roadside grass, but Margaret was still in the saddle, when the others arrived and the landlord helped François to carry Fraser in.

The King, who was talking to the wife, called across to Margaret and Piero:

"An omelette, white wine, bread, cheese and honey, Madame will give us."

"She will save my life," laughed Piero, "for I have not eaten since noon yesterday."

He was leaning against the shoulder of Margaret's chestnut, and she looked down at him—at his ruffled hair all grey with dust and so near that by stretching her hand ever so little she could have stroked it. He lifted his head and looked up at her. The dust on his face was caked where the sweat had run down; a broad smear of blood went from one eyebrow to the blue-black of unshaven jaw and chin. There was blood, too, on the brown sinewy hand that lay on the horse's mane; from hair to heel of his riding-boots he was covered with white road dust and red brick-dust. The King strolled towards them, unruffled as if from François ministrations, the clear olive of his face smooth and cool. Piero held up his arms, and Margaret slipped from her saddle into them. For a moment she felt the hard, lean strength of his body against hers, smelt the faint pungent mixture of dust and sweat and blood, saw him no longer as polished metal, but as a fierce, beautiful wild animal, that had never known

confinement or restraint, the bars of a cage or the lash of the tamer's whip.

The King laughed.

"*Mon dieu!* Piero, you are the most perfect ruffian. One would certainly fear to meet you on a lonely road."

Piero stood back, scowled and answered rather sulkily in Italian.

"I have ridden fifty miles yesterday to get back to you in Avignon, changed horses without even entering the palace, ridden another twenty to the Pont du Garde, climbed like a cat up a brick arch in order to fall upon the heads of those devils, fought, bound up François' bleeding arm, and held that infernally heavy Scot on the grey. Do you then expect me to be a scented fop and exquisite elegant like Monsieur de Sarci?"

The King laid a hand on his shoulder with a smile.

"Be careful lest you soil your hand on my filthy coat. When will our meal be ready?"

"In twenty minutes, Madame said."

"*Bene! Au revoir, Mademoiselle.*"

He strode on rather stiffly round the corner of the inn, and the King and Margaret looked at each other and laughed.

"It is a spoilt child," he said; "but a wholly splendid one, and the most perfect of friends. You do not understand Italian?"

"A little. I have been learning it since I came to France."

They had half-finished the omelette when Piero reappeared, his hair black and shining with wet, dust and blood gone from face, hands and clothes. He sat down with an apology to Margaret and a laughing glance of repentance at the King and made short work of the rest of the huge omelette.

"You have been bathing?" asked Margaret.

"Sicuro! If there is water deep enough to swim in within a mile or two you can trust me to find it."

"Piero is entirely Roman in his passion for baths."

"I can imagine nothing worse than to have to remain dirty," answered Piero.

"There are worse things in the world than dirt," said the King.

"Pain perhaps, illness, starvation, thirst," replied Piero, getting strong white teeth to work on a thick hunch of hard bread and goats' milk cheese; "I should hate them all. May the gods avert them!"

He emptied the rest of the white wine into the cup of blue pottery and raised it to Margaret and the King.

"To you two! Good luck and more reunions as happy as this!"

"We should be pushing on," said the King, rising; "it will be after sunrise when we get to Avignon, and I would not too many were about to see our return. I am thinking of you, Mistress Ogilvie. What will the gossips say if you were seen at such an hour returning with the three of us?"

"That there is safety in numbers, let us hope!" she laughed; "I told Marie I might not return till late, or early, to leave the side-door unlocked and tell none I was out. So all will be well."

It was late the next afternoon when Margaret joined Clarice under the cedar. A cool breeze began to temper the tremendous heat of midday but men and beasts all seemed asleep except for the humming of indefatigable bees and the sharp chirruping of the cicadas.

Margaret lay idly on the grass, her shoulders against Clarice's knees, watching the lizards darting in and out of the cracks in one of the marble nymph's pedestals,

which was baked by the sun. She lived again the happenings of last night and morning; but keenest of all her memories was that of the moment when she had slipped from her saddle into Piero's arms, against his strong body, when all that was so fiercely male in him had called irresistibly to the feminine in her—a femininity which had lain dormant for twenty-five years under cold northern skies, but had rushed to full flowering in these few weeks of southern mid-summer. She remembered the faint, pungent mingling of dust and sweat and blood which had so queerly thrilled her, and suddenly she wondered—sand and dust soaked in blood, the reek of fighting beasts and sweating gladiators, was that part of the lure of the Roman arena which maddened men and women with such cruel lust?

"What are you thinking about so intently?" asked Clarice.

"About Roman games, beasts and gladiators."

"He is very Roman, isn't he?"

Margaret sat up and faced her quickly.

"Who?"

"The Prince of Este, of course," laughed Clarice. "Part of it is genuine, you know. Only a part is pose, such as wearing his hair like that without a wig."

"*Chérie,* you are a witch! How did you know? But tell me, since you know so much, is it possible to love two men at once?"

"It depends on what you mean by love."

"Perhaps, after all, it is friendship—not love."

"One may be, but not the other."

Margaret plucked a daisy and began absently to pick off its pink petals.

"*Il m'aime,*" smiled Clarice; "*un peu, beaucoup, passionément——*"

Margaret clapped a hand over her mouth.

"Not *pas du tout,*" she cried. "Leave out that unlucky chance. But I would I knew."

"Can one love without knowledge?"

"You, Clarice, who are so wise, tell me."

"I will tell you one certain thing, *chérie.* I love one man as I have never loved another and never shall. That is Jules."

"Lucky Jules to be so loved!"

Jules' voice, mocking as ever, answered behind her.

"Lucky indeed to find his name on such lovely lips."

Margaret sprang to her feet, her cheeks flaming scarlet.

"You heard naught else?"

"To have heard Clarice's last words tells me the subject of your talk—the last words of Dante's 'Paradiso.' "

" 'Love,' " murmured Clarice, " 'that moves the sun in heaven and all the stars.' "

"And is also useful in replenishing the human and animal live-stock on this negligible little planet," said her brother, flinging himself on the grass where Margaret had sat, and leaning back against Clarice, whose hand caressed his cheek.

"You are tired. Have you only just arrived?"

"This instant. *Ma foi!* The road from Orange is a burning fiery furnace with a desert of dust added. I am hot, dusty, thirsty, and most infernally cross."

Margaret looked down at his carefully curled wig, powdered face, spotless lace cravat, elegantly cool coat of pale violet silk, silk stockings and buckled shoes; she smelt the violet scent on wig and cravat and smiled. He looked up and saw her.

"My sister, Mademoiselle mocks herself of me! That breaks my heart."

"Can it not be mended?" laughed Margaret.

"Only by drink. If Clarice will bring me enough to drown myself in."

Then, as Clarice vanished swiftly as a rose petal driven by the wind, he flung himself on the seat beside Margaret, his mask of gaiety gone, his face haggard with fatigue and anxiety.

"Not a trace of the papers. I have exhausted every means of search, but in vain. Yet I cannot believe they have reached Stair, or he would have struck by now."

"They are found."

He turned with an expression of amazed incredulity.

"When? Where? How?"

"Last night, but there is the king coming out with Clarice, so you will hear all."

"Also *Monsieur le Prince d'Este,*" drawled Jules, as Piero followed the others out of the house; "as always the unruffled Roman patrician, the bronze demi-god whose polish none can dull, whose self-assurance none can dim."

"I disagree, Monsieur de Sarci."

"You have seen him ruffled? Impossible! Angry, yes. Shall I show you?"

She shook her head, half-smiling, half-frowning.

"It is not necessary to convert me. I have seen him angry."

They were soon all seated round a silver tray holding a golden dish piled with peaches, plums and the earliest grapes, and tall Venetian glasses brimming with white wine cooled in snow.

"Monsieur de Sarci," said the King, "it is part of my happy turn of fortune that you are here, so that I may tell you the good news. And you, Mademoiselle Clarice, must now hear the story so, with your permission, I have asked Père de St. Etienne to join us here. There he is."

Jules went to give the Jesuit his arm down the long

flight of steps, and when he was seated the King resumed.

"None of us know your contribution to the story, *mon père,* but first I will make it clear for Mademoiselle de Sarci."

When he had sketched it for Clarice, he turned again to Père de St. Etienne.

"As yet we know nothing of Fraser and the papers between the day of their loss and last night. Will you enlighten us?"

"When I found Mademoiselle's note on my return last night I set out at once in search of Luc Roche. He was not at the Papal palace, nor with his mother. As I returned from the Rue des Cordeliers something drew me onto the ruined bridge to the chapel of St. Bénézet. A strange impulse, since, as we all know, the bridge leads nowhere, but ends in midstream, and my limp does not make walking a pleasure for me. You all know the chapel —bare, deserted, with open Romanesque arch framing the ruined stone altar which looks down onto the green water below, curling in little spurts of foam against the Roman piers."

Margaret shivered; she fancied she heard again the sickening thud of the skull cracking on the stone of the Pont du Garde. The Jesuit looked at her.

"Yes, Mademoiselle, a very terrible death and one which would have been Luc Roche's fate had I not chanced to find him huddled between the altar and the wall. He started when he heard my stick on the stones, and would have been over before I could reach him but for the crook of my old stick with which I caught him round the ankle and tripped him as he was poised to jump."

"We have as yet heard nothing about the papers," remarked Piero.

"True, *mon Prince;* I grow old and tedious. I took

him back to the Entraigues palace, made him eat and drink and soothed him till he could tell a coherent story. As Your Majesty knows, Luc went a few weeks ago to his uncle for a visit at the farm a little way down the river from *les Trois Peupliers*. The uncle had been out one night looking for a strayed kid and found in the water of the river a man with a bad wound on his head. He fished him out and took him home, and finding on him a fat purse of louis as well as an elaborately sealed packet, decided to play the Good Samaritan and keep him till he recovered. Luc, of course, at once recognized Alan Fraser, but could understand his ravings no more than could the others."

"Had the packet not been opened?" asked Margaret.

"Neither Jean Roche, his wife nor his daughter could read, and he was frightened by the imposing array of seals."

"Fourteen quarterings are sometimes useful after all," murmured Jules.

"Fraser talked nothing but Scotch at first when delirious. His soaking, combined with the wound in his head, made by a tree stump as he fell into the river, gave him a bad and prolonged bout of fever."

"That explains why the papers, stolen so long ago, never reached Stair," said the King. "I regret, Monsieur de Sarci, that you have had an unnecessary journey to Paris and back."

"There is also something to be said in favour of a Roman passion for bathing," remarked Piero, "in spite of Your Majesty's jests on the subject. If I had not gone swimming in the Rhone by moonlight I should not have had the felicity of meeting Monsieur Fraser, who, in a few days' time, would have delivered the papers safely into Stair's hands."

"Luc Roche, *mon père,*" said the King: "is all well with him now?"

The Jesuit nodded and Margaret looked at the King, who seemed more interested in the welfare of a spy than in the loss of papers which might have cost him the chance of a kingdom. Then she spoke.

"But I still do not understand why Luc carried that note from Fraser to the King yesterday."

"The motives of others are seldom easy to understand, Mademoiselle," answered the Jesuit; "indeed, few of us succeed in disentangling our own. I will try and explain what I myself deduced from the facts. Luc adored his mother, was ready to do anything for her, and having once embarked on a course which did not seem wrong and which promised comfort for his mother, was determined to carry it through."

"Then what made him suddenly change, come to me and confess it all?"

"Humanly speaking, the same motive. Some words he overheard after delivering the note made him suspect it was a trap. Then he went home, saw his mother, heard that the King and you, Mademoiselle Ogilvie, had visited and helped her. That completed the reversion which his two meetings with the King had already begun."

"We are all in your debt, *mon père,* for having satisfied our curiosity," said the King. "Now that the papers are safe we have all the necessary information from England."

"And Spain?" asked Jules, with a side glance at Piero. "If it is permitted to enquire about so secret a subject."

"The Spanish minister demands time," replied the King, "before committing himself to any definite declaration in our favour. He thinks that a trade treaty with the present English Government is more to Spanish inter-

est, and naturally the interest of Spain comes first with him."

"Naturally," murmured Jules, "it would be paramount with him, being Italian."

"Till we can make Cardinal Alberoni realise that the negotiations between France and England will crystallize into a definite treaty of alliance he will do nothing."

"The Abbé Dubois is at the Hague now, or has been within the last few days," said Jules, "under pretence of buying books and pictures, but in reality to confer with Lord Stanhope, the English Secretary of State, and possibly with the Elector himself, who left England for Hanover on July 9."

"Meantime," said the King, "there is no more to do at present but to wait on time with patience and pray for success. All of you, my friends, have worked hard, travelled far and suffered much for my sake. If I cannot express my gratitude as I would, it is because words are useless before the great things of life and death. For the next few weeks let us forget politics and misfortunes, enjoy the sunshine, youth and happiness. To you, and to halcyon days."

The halcyon days that came at the King's call slipped by in a lotus dream of long summer sunshine, golden moonlit nights, dances, dinners, plays, rides, fairs and hunting. The Prince d'Auvergne brought his bride, Olive, to his Avignon palace, but Jules took a smaller house for his sister, and there Lady Mary was persuaded to come for a week.

"No longer," she said firmly to Margaret on her second evening in Avignon. "It is hot enough in this stone oven to make one cook like bacon in one's own fat, if one had any. But you are radiant. You were handsome; now you are beautiful."

"My Italian blood answering to the southern sunshine, Aunt Mary."

"Southern fiddlesticks! I may be old, but I'm not yet a fool. Youth answering to youth. No need to blush about it, and you needn't tell me who he is, if you don't want to."

Margaret laughed.

"Your eyes would see through any pretext, but I can't tell you, for I don't know myself."

"Too many of them? No, that would not be your way. To-morrow's the Sabbath, Meg, and I'll warrant you've not been to kirk since we left Paris."

"The King has two Protestant chaplains, you know, for his household; Dr. Charles Leslie and Mr. Ezechiel Hamilton, and there are prayers in a room in the Entraigues palace."

"Well, I shall have to pocket my Whig principles for once and go under the roof of the—the *Chevalier de St. Georges.*"

"You know you fell a victim to him that day at Vaucluse, Aunt Mary. None can resist him whom he chooses to fascinate."

Lady Mary gave her niece a sharp glance.

"Do you remember what I said to you just before we reached Paris?"

" 'Loyalty for a Stuart is near akin to love,' you said, and that is true. And 'Love for a Stuart brings at best misfortune and at worst dishonour.' If fear of misfortune dims loyalty 'tis no true loyalty; and for the rest, that's no word for an Ogilvie."

"Well spoken, lassie; we'll argue no more about it."

The next morning Lady Mary and her niece joined the handful of devout men and women whose Protestant belief was strong enough to make them spend a glorious summer morning shut into a dark little room in the

Entraigues palace. Hopelessly puzzled by the intricacies of the unfamiliar Episcopalian service, Margaret gave up trying to follow it, and studied Dr. Charles Leslie, the author of that description of the King which she had known by heart in those days at Dundee, now so far away. The old man wore a black gown and white bands; his clever, legal face expressed an unusual combination of enthusiasm and humour, and Margaret, knowing how he had renounced place and position in Ireland and the prospects of great preferment in the Church of England, for the sake of conscience and his rightful King, looked with admiration and respect at him who, like her own father, had come to spend his old age and lay his bones in exile.

As the little congregation dispersed in the hall the King and Piero came in with Mar. The King saw Lady Mary and Margaret, and, leaving Mar, came to them.

"It is indeed a wonder to see you bow down in the house of Rimmon, Lady Mary," he said.

"Since there is no other chance of a decent Protestant service in this country, *Monsieur le Chevalier,*" she replied bluntly, "what choice have I?"

"Then be a little grateful to the so bigoted Popish Pretender who supplies you both with chaplain and service."

"I am indeed grateful for the privilege I owe to you."

"You can show it by sparing us your niece this afternoon. The Lord of Goult has bidden a few of us to a fête in his garden. Piero, come and add your persuasions. Lady Mary Gordon, this is my friend and kinsman, the Prince of Este. A kinsman also of Mistress Ogilvie on her mother's side, as I, too, have the honour to be."

Lady Mary walked the short distance home with her hand on Piero's arm, and Margaret, who followed with Ian, knew by the flash of Piero's white teeth and the

frequent ripple of his laughter that her aunt's shrewd and caustic comments on men and matters were appreciated.

"I should think ye a gey fulish lass, Meg," was Lady Mary's only remark, "if ye're daft enough to prefer that unco guid Chevalier to his kinsman. One's a saint, and saints are ill to live with; the other's a man."

It was a perfect afternoon for the Doni fête; a cool breeze tempered the August heat so that dancing in the shade was as pleasant as the languor of restful music between the dances. The King, who had led out Donna Julia for the first minuet, then called on her to sing.

"If Monsieur le Prince will play for me," she said, lifting deep eyes to Piero's, *"'Quant è bella giovanezza?' Ma sicuro!"*

She sang in her luscious contralto, but it was the obbligato of Piero's Stradivarius which woke in old hearts memories of vanished youth and fears in young hearts of the swift, inexorable oncoming of age. *"Che se fugge tuttavia"*—one little hour of sunshine, of love, and the delicious languor of desire fulfilled before darkness and forgetfulness!

When the last violin notes were silent the Lord of Goult, whose white curls crowned an aquiline Roman face, laid a fine brown hand on Piero's shoulder.

"Principe," he said, "you have laid us all in your debt, but how much more me, your countryman, to whom you bring again, alive and breathing, the ghosts of long-dead youth and love."

The audience broke into groups of twos and threes; the young men with their gay coats and red-heeled shoes, the women with high lace fontanges, gleaming jewels and rainbow gowns, making bright patches of colour against sunbaked marble and the blue shade of pines and ilexes. The King stood on the steps, the orange trees in their

bronze urns stiff as heraldic supporters, the fruit burning like balls of fire among the dark leaves sharp-cut as a metal relief against the enamel-blue sky. He was a splendid figure in a coat of rose-coloured silk, whose skirts and lapels were stiff with silver lace; his waistcoat was of silver brocade; the Venice point lace of cravat and ruffles was fastened with black velvet; the feather in his black hat was blue like the Garter ribbon, and the stars of his other orders gleamed on his breast. He was with Clarice, radiant in palest green and misty blue, and presently Margaret and Piero, who were following them, found themselves by the sundial in the rose-enclosure.

"Last time I was here," said Piero with a laugh, "I shed my blood to please a woman."

A sudden memory came to Margaret of the words she had heard him say when almost unconscious on the Perth road: "Maria" and *"Cuore mio."* A surge of jealousy rose in her so fierce that she felt as if it clutched her by the throat.

"Was her name——" she began, then broke off and began to spell the motto, leaning over the dial: *"Horas non numero——"*

"'Quant' è bella!'" he hummed. "But *'Che se fugge tuttavia!'* It is the same thing. Will you not guess her name?"

"It does not interest me."

"But I think it does."

He stood so close that she could feel his breath on her neck as she leant over the sundial. She turned and faced him.

"I will tell you. It was Maria."

He looked puzzled.

"It was Maria," she repeated; "I know, because when you thought you were dying on the Perth road——"

"You thought so too! You were very cruel to me and

nearly finished me with hell-fire to drink. What did I say of Maria?"

"Something about her and *'Cuore mio.'* I have often wondered who she was."

"Then you *were* jealous?"

"No, curious."

"I will tell you," he laughed: "when one is at the point of death one becomes a child again; one goes back to the prayers at one's mother's knee. It is a prayer Catholics say when they are dying: 'Jesus, Mary, Joseph, I give you my heart.'"

"I am glad. It must be comforting to believe like that."

"Did we come here to talk religion on such a day? *Peste!* There is de Sarci with Olive."

"I thought the Princesse d'Auvergne was a great friend of yours."

"*He* is not. Come now, spell out this with me. If we look very intent perhaps they will go away."

She stood erect, looking down at him as he leant over the lead letters, lean yet graceful in his coat of apricot silk and gold waistcoat, the sun reflected from his smooth shining hair. There were gleams of copper in his hair; it smelt sweet yet pungent with some aromatic herb; the little hairs on the nape of his neck shone like copper; the skin of his neck was smooth and cool as honey-coloured marble. She could see the texture of the skin on cheek and jaw, velvety as a nectarine, sun-warmed, hard and sweet, with gold deepening to orange. Then suddenly he was erect, holding her hands in his, her eyes with his, amber eyes all flecked with green and brown in the sunlight, but deep and burning. She gave a little cry.

"The *bal masqué* at the Palais Royal, you were there?"

"What of it?"

"Your dress?"

"Have you forgotten Mercury? It is a dream of silver."

"I thought Mercury was the King. He wore his diamond ring."

He opened his eyes wide in surprise, then his mouth opened too as he laughed.

"*Dio mio!* How could you think that?"

"It is easy to make mistakes when people are masked. You and the King are about the same height and your voices are alike."

"Did you think James would make love like that?"

"He has, perhaps, not had so much practice as you."

She tried to draw her hands away, but he held them fast and grew serious.

"Will you believe me if I tell you that I had never held a woman in my arms, never kissed a woman like that before?"

"And since?"

"Nor since. Do you believe me?"

"If it is the truth."

"It is true."

He dropped her hands abruptly and drew away, looking murderous.

"That young cub, Pietro Doni. Ten thousand devils fly away with him!"

Pietro, blissfully unconscious, arrived breathless with haste, but happy and important.

"Mademoiselle, there is to be a pavane on the terrace before supper, and the King will have none but you for his partner, so bade me find and bring you."

Piero, left alone, drew in out of sight behind a yew-tree as he heard the sound of footsteps and a tapping stick, and the legate, with Père de St. Etienne, paused beside the sundial.

"*'Horas non numero nisi serenas,'*" smiled the legate. "Some, then, are ever young."

"But it is possible, Monsignor, to be happy without external serenity."

"*'Pax inter spinas?'* A Benedictine motto, rather than a Jesuit one. But one that is specially applicable to the King, is it not? Let us sit here. I am tired, and you must be still more so with your old wounds. Has the King spoken to you of his marriage?"

There was a pause as they sat down, and Piero remained an unwilling listener.

"The King is prepared in that as in all else," replied the Jesuit, "to subordinate his own desires to his duty; if need be to sacrifice all, as indeed he has already done, for the Catholic religion and, in a lesser degree, the Jacobite Cause."

"His marriage is a necessity, but it would no doubt be easier if inclination went with policy."

"That goes without saying."

"You have heard no talk coupling the King's name with a lady's?"

"None, Monsignor."

"There is talk, and I think not without foundation, that the King has been more interested in Mistress Margaret Ogilvie than he has been in any woman. They met first, I am told, in Scotland. You were there, *mon père.*"

"I noticed that the King seemed interested."

The legate leant forward and emphasised his points with a plump forefinger.

"Now it is more than that. They are continually together. Everyone notices that the King has been younger, gayer, happier these last few weeks than ever before. More, she was seen one morning at sunrise returning with him from the country."

"An early ride."

"The King rode out before sunset the night before. This morning I ventured to speak to him again of the necessity for his marriage, to which he agreed, and of a royal marriage, to which he replied, drawing himself up with imposing dignity, and jutting out his underlip in that way he has when vexed: 'Monsignor, if I must be sacrificed on the altar of matrimony, I insist at least on my right to choose for myself the mother of my sons.'"

"Against the Stuart obstinacy, once roused, it is useless to break oneself. But that night ride——"

The legate waved a white hand.

"Innocent, my dear Père de St. Etienne, I know as well as you do. But we also know what view gossip will take. The question then remains: if the King has set his mind and heart upon this young Scottish lady, what is best to be done?"

"She would be a good wife to him and a good mother for his sons," mused the Jesuit. "She would make life gayer, brighter, easier, altogether happier for him. She is of noble blood, and the fact that she is Scottish and Protestant would be a valuable asset in the eyes of British Episcopalians and Presbyterians."

"You think she is willing?"

"Can any man answer for a woman's heart, Monsignor? But I think she is too clear-sighted not to appreciate the King at his true value, apart from her traditional and hereditary loyalty to his Cause."

"The crown and the throne too," said the legate as he rose, "though at present only *de jure,* may also have their weight in the scales."

CHAPTER VI

TRAPPED!

It was mid-September when Jules de Sarci gave up the house in Avignon and arranged to bring Clarice to Vaucluse, where Margaret had already rejoined her aunt. The last week or two time had hung heavy on her hands. The beauties of mountain and waterfall, forest vineyards, mulberry and olive trees no longer charmed; she hunted a little with neighbours, and worked hard at Italian, so that she now found herself able to read Petrarch's *"Rime"* without difficulty. She would sit above the little pool with a book on her knee, looking west through the heat-haze towards Avignon and dreaming of love. Petrarch, who had lived and written amid these very woods and hills and streams, remained an enigma to her. To see and love at first sight, as he had seen and loved Laura in the church of St. Clara in Avignon, that was easy to understand; but to love with soul, heart and body for half a century, with a passion distant, adoring, unsatisfied, that was incomprehensible.

Margaret came down from the pool on the morning of Clarice's arrival to find that the de Sarci coach had an escort of the King, Piero and all the younger, gayer spirits. They had arranged a *fête pastorale* only that morning, the King explained to Lady Mary, who had come out into the courtyard, and would she and Mistress Ogilvie join them at the *al fresco* meal by Petrarch's pool? The old lady laughingly but firmly declined, but

invited them all to a stirrup-cup before their return to Avignon.

Then, as the gay cavalcade moved off, she touched Jules' arm.

"Clarice looks tired already. She had better stay with me and rest."

"I also, Miladi, will stay, with your permission, for I ride straight to Orange on my way to Paris. Your air here may do Clarice good. It was hot, too hot for her in Avignon, but she would not leave till Mademoiselle returned to you."

"She must stay till we go back to Paris at the end of this month—longer, if it does her good."

"How can I thank you? If anything happened—if Clarice were to die——"

He turned a ravaged face to her, and she put her old hand down on his thin, twisting fingers.

"My dear Jules, you think you would die too. But you will not. One continues to live even when one's heart is dead and buried. There is no tragedy in this world which kills one, unless one is a coward, and you are not that."

He lifted his head and his great dark eyes were full of tears.

"I am a de Sarci," he said.

Piero, whom Margaret had never seen alone since the Doni fête, was in great spirits, talking, laughing, bursting into snatches of Italian song, making extravagant compliments to Donna Julia and Olive.

"Why go any further?" asked Julia, sinking onto the turf as they reached the pool. "The two greatest mistakes in life are to do to-day what can be left till to-morrow, and to walk two kilomètres when one will suffice."

"'*Dolce far niente*,' says the wisest of Sybils," cried

Piero, flinging himself at her feet. "And who will now recite the *'Canzoniere'?"*

"Obviously you, Pierre," said Olive, who was next him.

"Adorable princess," he murmured, laying his head on her feet, "I could remain faithful to no woman for half a century, unless you were the woman."

"Faithfulness," remarked the Prince d'Auvergne, "is a relative term. We know that Petrarch had a mistress at Vaucluse who bore him children."

"There is surely a faithfulness of the body and one of the heart," said the King. "Need one confuse them? One is passion, the other sublimated friendship."

"I could call nothing love which does not combine both those," replied Margaret.

"One would not expect a woman to understand," answered Piero, and both eyes and voice were bright and hard as metal; "one might love a woman all one's life, yet another might rouse passion."

The King looked at him. There was a feeling of tension in the air unwarranted by the subject of discussion, and now broken by the arrival of the servants with the *al fresco* meal.

As the party started on the way back to the chateau Margaret found herself with the King. They were the last to leave the glade, and as they turned to go one yellow leaf fluttered through the still air onto the King's shoulder. He picked it off and looked down at it in the palm of his hand.

"The beginning of the end," he said. "An omen that our halcyon days are over—summer and sunshine done and autumn come."

He lifted his eyes to hers, and she noticed how thin he had grown; the fine mask of the long oval face had sharpened under the olive skin; the bones of shoulder

and wrist were clearly visible through the fine green cloth of his coat and the lace ruffles at his hands.

"You have bad news, Sire?"

"Naught else. As his Grace of Mar so aptly put it, I can scarce be in a worse condition than I am at present, so needs must be less concerned at aught that happens."

"Spain has failed you?"

"I have no hopes of present help from them. Abbé Dubois and the Elector have met at Hanover and fully discussed the terms of a Triple Alliance between England, France and Holland."

"Ill news indeed."

"But not the worst. The Regent is using all means within his power to force me beyond the Alps, and that, as you know, would be a well-nigh fatal blow to my Cause."

"He cannot make you leave the Papal State."

The King laughed a little bitterly.

"Cannot is a word which Orleans does not like when it runs counter to his desires. Elector George insists on 'Beyond the Alps' before he will sign the treaty. Orleans has threatened to stop payment of my mother's pension, and I hear he told Stair that the French troops in Languedoc are under orders to invade the Papal city and seize my person if all other methods fail."

"If you submit, Sire, this means yet further exile and diminished hopes."

"Further exile, greater loneliness and, I fear, patient endurance rather than hope."

"If my service, my loyalty, were of any help to you, Sire, but they are useless. I can do naught."

"You have already done so much that I cannot tell you all that your friendship has meant and means to me."

She held out her hands, and he took them, looking at her very gravely and intently.

"You have been and done so much. But if in the future I were to ask still more——"

"You need but to ask, Sire, or, if I could forestall your wishes, not even to ask."

"I have your promise then—one star at least amid the gathering shades."

Avignon struck like a furnace after the wide upland spaces and cool breezes of Vaucluse. The heat radiated from the sun-baked roofs and walls and cobble-stones, till they almost burned when touched, and the air was heavy with the stale smell of scorching dust and the filth and garbage of the narrow, ill-kept streets. As the King and Piero dismounted at the Entraigues palace the cathedral bell was ringing for Vespers.

"Come up to the cathedral, Piero. I cannot bear this heat; it is absolutely prostrating."

Piero's face, which had been very grim, softened as he thrust a hand through the King's arm.

"You will not come in and rest? Then I will come with you."

They climbed the long flight of steps to the cathedral terrace in silence and stood looking at the Fort of St. André across the river. A few houses clung precariously to the steep side of rock falling from their feet to the Rhone, which circled the ruined walls and red roofs of the city. Below them was the old Pont d'Avignon, ending abruptly in mid-river, like a tale half-told; the ruined Romanesque chapel of St. Bénézet, where Père de St. Etienne had found Luc Roche, half-way along it. Northward the Rhone wound through olive, fig, mulberry, almond, peach and cherry trees, till in the far distance the sharp volcanic peaks of the Jura mountains shone

a vivid cobalt blue under the golden sky. A light breeze had risen as the sun went down; it stirred the heavy boughs of the stone-pines, and made a solitary cypress sway darkly slender against the sky. A few soft clouds drifted lazily eastward and cast moving purple shadows on flat yellow stubble-fields in the valley and the red-brown of vineyards on the hillsides.

The King sat down wearily on the low wall and put his hand to his forehead.

"You are tired, *Jacopo mio,*" said Piero tenderly. "And the pain?"

"I have known it worse. It was as bad that time in Flanders, but it seems harder to bear now. Perhaps I am growing old."

"Not that, but you have so much else to bear. It is too much."

Piero sat beside him and put an arm about his shoulders.

"Dio mio! You are nothing but bones!"

James smiled at him.

"So you have told me before, and I am still alive. But that was not what you were going to say."

"No, it was this. I am leaving for Paris to-morrow."

The almond eyes opened very wide.

"Paris? To-morrow? And I knew nothing of it! For long? Or is that also a secret?"

"From all but you. I must see the Regent—unofficially—my mission unknown to all and uncountenanced by you. If I fail, you are no worse off than now. If I succeed, well then there is that plot on which the Spanish ambassador has already been approached."

"I like not plots."

"Prince Cellamare, as you know, is Cardinal Alberoni's agent in his intrigues against the Regent and his endeavours to have Philip V proclaimed King if the

present child dies. Cellamare is in touch with all the discontented French nobles—most of all, of course, with the Duc de Maine."

"'Tis true *he* has little reason to like or trust Orleans, who supplanted him as guardian of the young King."

"'Twould be well were I in touch with Cellamare and Maine, and on the spot to use all possible influence to your advantage, without involving you officially."

"You will write?"

"Safer not to put aught on paper till I return."

"When will that be?"

"Chi lo sa?"

"I shall be lonely."

Piero turned his sombre gaze on the King.

"You will not be if other plans materialize."

"You mean my marriage? 'Tis a necessity of State."

"Yet, since you must marry, better surely if inclination gilds necessity."

"You mean love? But friendship on one side alone is impossible, and one-sided love a tragedy. Women love beauty, and I'm no beauty. They bow to success, and I'm a failure. They worship strength, and I'm weak. They have a *tendresse* for vice, and I'm not vicious. What chance then have I to win a woman's love?"

Piero laughed grimly.

"I think that neither you nor I know aught of women. I at least do not pretend to understand them. Why, then, do we waste time in discussing them? Are you going into the cathedral?"

James rose.

"For a moment, yes. Will you wait?"

"Carissimo, I know your moments when you pray; they are eternal. I'll go and see to my preparations. And since I start at dawn tomorrow——"

The terrace was deserted and James stretched out both hands and took Piero's.

"When you rode to Spain you said you were afraid that it was the end. You see now that you were wrong."

"I was right."

"How?"

"I cannot tell you."

"No. The milestones of life are a series of farewells, but love is a journey that never ends. It is always a beginning. Is it not so?"

Piero's eyes were downcast, but on the thick lashes a tear shone.

"I have always been a dreamer, Piero, and the dreams never come true—dreams and shadows, and I but a shadowy king of dreams. But there is one reality for me in the world of men—only one now, for I shall never see my mother again in this life—and that is our friendship. That has been, is and will always be, the crown of my life—a crown not of shadows, but of pure gold which endureth unto everlasting."

Piero kissed the King's hands again and again in silence, then ran down the steps without looking back, and as he entered the dimness of the empty nave the King's hands were wet with tears.

2

It was a dreary afternoon of late October, and the rain was lashing against the window of the big room in the de Sarci hotel, where Margaret sat reading aloud to her aunt. Lady Mary Gordon had been in bed since their arrival in Paris, having been badly chilled on the day when they had to stand in rain and cold in the forest of Fontainebleau, while the coach was extricated from the slough in which one wheel had sunk. Jean came into

the room to say that Lord Stair was below, asking for her Ladyship.

"Tell him I'm ill in bed and can't see him, Jean."

The maid returned in a minute with a smile.

"'Tell the auld leddie, dinna fash yersel',' said his lairdship, 'for I'll see the lassie.'"

Lady Mary looked at Margaret, who hesitated, then rose.

"I will go, Aunt Mary. Maybe he has the letters for you."

But as she went downstairs Margaret knew that it was not for her aunt's sake that she was willing to face Lord Stair, but on the chance of gleaning from him some fragment of news which might be of use to the Cause or help to stay the aching of her own empty heart. She had never seen Piero again since the day at Vaucluse, where he had been so strangely bitter and antagonistic. He had vanished from Avignon without a good-bye; gone none knew whither, unless it were the King, whom she had not seen either, for he had been ill when she and her aunt had started north.

She entered the salon and curtsied in her most stately manner to Lord Stair, who was standing at the window with a bundle of letters in his hand.

"Provence has suited you," he said, with his sarcastic smile. "You have bloomed into a very beautiful woman. Was it the Midi sun or the charms of Avignon society?"

"Aunt Mary only spent a week in Avignon. She preferred the seclusion of Vaucluse."

"But with her usual good sense did not compel you to hide your light under a rustic bushel. You were in Avignon nearly two months, I think, and once more I must congratulate the Pretender on his taste."

"Lord Stair, do not waste more of your valuable time in jests."

"No time is wasted that is spent with you. Do you speak Italian?"

She looked at him in surprise.

"Fairly well. I have been learning."

"Congratulations on your forethought. 'Beyond the Alps.' Doubtless you have heard it is one of the conditions most insisted on by His Gracious Majesty King George. Therefore 'tis as well to know the language in advance."

Margaret faced him with head up.

"I fail to understand your Lordship."

He laughed.

"Not a quiver, not a blush! Gad! what self-possession! Or has mine arrow drawn at a venture found the wrong target? I'll borrow one of Cupid's and try again. The Prince of Este, you know the result of his last venture and his present predicament?"

Try as she would, Margaret could not prevent the quick surge of blood to her face nor stay the flutter of her heart. She did not answer, but Stair stepped to her, put out a long finger and tilted her chin before she had time to shrink away.

"Devilish pretty," he said, his thin lips curled in that evil smile. "Let me perish but, for the sake of that glorious blush and that quick throbbing heart, I'd gladly change places with the Prince of Este—though not at the present moment."

She drew away from him and he leant against the side of the window, his arms folded, a quietly aristocratic figure in the plain, but rich coat of black satin braided with silver, the green ribbon of the Thistle at his breast, the heavy curls of his grey wig shadowing the pale face and strange eyes. A chill as of death struck Margaret. "Not at the moment." That must mean that Piero was in deadly peril, perhaps captured, in Stair's power.

"God forbid!" she exclaimed involuntarily.

The thick grey eyebrows lifted in amusement.

"That I should be in his place? Thanks, kinswoman, for your Christian charity."

Margaret felt like a hunted beast, afraid to make one false step, lest it be trapped, so she played for time.

"I think, my Lord, you have some letters for my Aunt."

"And one for you."

He handed it to her, flinging the others onto the table, and sat down.

"Yours, if I mistake not, is from Master Forbes, a wise man who gangs his ain gait and meddles with no politics. I too had one from him. Will you not open yours to see if he asks the same service as of me?"

Still standing, Margaret broke the seals and drew out two sheets, one covered with Jock Forbes' crabbed legal writing, on the other a few wavering lines in Elsie's childish scrawl.

"My dear Child," wrote Master Forbes, "I know not where you are nor when this will reach you. I am writing also to Lord Stair to ask if he has news of Alan Fraser. He left Dundee soon after you had gone to France. Elsie had a letter from him writ in Paris in May, and since then we have heard naught from him. But one who returned from France about three months ago told us that Alan had been killed while on some dangerous business. Elsie fell like a broken flower when she heard it, and I thought she was indeed dead till Janet brought her back to consciousness at long last. Now I must watch her wasting day by day like a flower that droops and dies for lack of water. She lies there, never complaining, but always watching, listening for the footstep that never comes.

Meg, if you can, help us. For God's sake save my child by news of Alan. If he lives and knew, he must surely come at once."

Remorse stabbed her; she had forgotten Alan Fraser as completely as she had forgotten Jock Forbes and Elsie; since Alan's unconscious form had been carried into the inn she knew nothing of him.

" 'Twere pity if that pretty child should die for lack of news about her lover, such as you can supply," said Stairs softly.

Margaret met his gaze squarely.

"I know no more of Alan Fraser's present situation than does your lordship."

"Why think you I know naught of him?"

"If you knew you would not seek to learn from me the whereabouts of one of your own spies."

"A neat disengage, cousin," he laughed. "Now, before our duel ends, I will attack without feint."

"Is it possible?"

"I'll ask you no more of Fraser. He's failed, so I've no use for him. He may be broke and flung away. But feelings for your cousin will make you find and send him home, and so save me the trouble."

"You are very sure of me."

"More than 'tis possible to be with most women. You're an Ogilvie; with you honour and loyalty come before all."

"Do you use even virtue to your own base ends?"

"The end justifies the means, as your Pretender's confessor no doubt teaches him. But there's somewhat you'd ask of me before I go."

She went to the door and held it open, but he stood warming his hands at the wood fire till she spoke.

"Naught. There is naught I would demean myself to ask from you."

"Be not too sure," he chuckled. "There is something for which you may kneel in prayer to me before you've done."

"Never!"

"Never's a long word. Even death does not end it."

"Then *you* should fear it, Lord Stair, as you must fear death if you believe in the hereafter."

She fancied a shadow flitted across his pale face and his eyes gleamed strangely in the firelight.

"*'Di doman non c'è certezza!'*" he quoted with a crooked smile, and such an awful feeling of fear swept over her that she leant back against the door, eyes shut, faint with nausea. Then she opened her eyes and drew away, shuddering at the light touch of an icy finger on her cheek; his eyes were so close that the cold fire in them seemed to shrivel her.

"*Touchée* that time, Cousin Meg! If you would have news of him, come to the Embassy tomorrow at noon and I promise you you shall hear of him."

"Never!" she said again. "Never, I swear!"

"'Swear not at all,'" he mocked. "But I fancy I am safe in saying: Au revoir."

He bowed ceremoniously, and went with stately mien down the wide stair.

"You've been a gey long time with Jock," said the old lady from the depths of her bed. "Has he made you a Whig?"

Margaret laid the letters on the bed and sat down by the window while her aunt made a running and caustic commentary on her correspondence.

"Had ye no letters, Meg? Ye're looking white, and I thought mebbe ye'd had bad news."

"One from Cousin Jock," said Margaret, bringing it and perching on the foot of the bed. "Alan Fraser's disappeared, and Elsie's ill."

"Little fule! As if any mon was worth fashin yersel' aboot."

"Cousin Jock wrote also to Lord Stair, but he knows no more of Alan's whereabouts than I do."

"I was wrong, then, for I had an idea Fraser worked for him."

"He did, but failed, so Lord Stair said: 'He may be broke and flung away.' Aunt Mary, how can you bear to have Lord Stair in the house?"

"What's wrong with the man but that he's a Whig and serves King George like myself?"

"There's more than that. Cannot you feel the evil about him?"

"Hoots, lassie! Ye'll be saying next he's the deil himself."

"Not so far from it."

"Nonsense and foolish fancies. I thought ye'd more sense. I don't believe in the devil."

"Don't you believe in God?"

"I belong to the Episcopalian Church and have something better to do than waste time thinking about angels and devils and such nonsense. Any more than I've any inclination to be a Jacobite or a Papist. A Protestant king on the British throne, and a good strong, moneyed Whig aristocracy to keep him and the lower classes in their proper places, and all's good enough for me and any other sensible body."

Margaret gave a laugh as she slipped from the room and halfway downstairs paused to look out of the window, where she had seen Père de St. Etienne and Clarice in the garden. If only one of them or Jules were here now; but the house was silent, empty, lifeless as a body from which the soul has fled, and she was lonely and horribly afraid. The door into the little cabinet was ajar, and she stole in. In the falling twilight the china and ivories

gleamed ghostly; the exquisite little ivory rose which Jules had given her and she had likened to a fairy gift, Piero had it now. Like all fairy gifts to mortals, had it brought evil in its train?

She stood looking out into the darkening night, and in that moment she knew she loved him, and him alone, would love no other while life lasted, would do all, sacrifice all to save him, as she had already given him her heart.

Noon passed the next day. Margaret wandered about the house like an unquiet spirit, and after dinner which she could not touch, she flung on cloak, hood and pattens and went out into the wind-swept, rain-drenched garden. Here Marie found her.

"A messenger for you, Mademoiselle."

"From whom?"

"He would say naught but that he must deliver it into no hands but yours."

There was nothing noticeable about the man, who looked like a valet, plainly dressed in black, but Margaret wondered if this were a trap, some device of Stair's, though she could not fathom his reason for desiring to get her to the Embassy.

"You are in truth Mademoiselle Ogilvie? Into no other hands was I to give this, and bid you come with me."

She took a small packet, unrolled a scrap of silk, and inside was the ivory rose which she had given Piero the night they had vowed friendship at Orange. She looked at it a moment, then slipped it into the breast of her gown and pulled the hood again over her hair.

"Marie, I must go."

"Not alone, Mademoiselle. I will get my cloak."

Margaret caught her by the arm and whispered rapidly:

"Tell Jean to say naught to Miladi unless I have not

returned in two hours' time, then let her ask Miladi to make enquiries of Lord Stair as to my welfare."

The man led the way in silence through narrow, winding streets till even Marie, Parisian born and bred, had lost all sense of direction, then at last he stopped to fit a large key into a low door.

"Did Lord Stair give you that packet?" asked Margaret, speaking for the first time.

"Milord Stair? I know nothing of it. Enter, Mademoiselle."

He stood aside to let them into a dark passage, locked the door again, took a lighted pine-torch from a bracket and went on, only pausing once to warn Margaret that a flight of steps was slippery with wet. Down and down they went, till the air struck icy and the water on walls and roof trickled into pools on the stone floor. The man unlocked another door and stood aside.

"Five steps down, Mademoiselle. I will leave you the torch."

Then to Marie: "You must wait here."

The banging of the heavy door and turning of the key drowned the end of Marie's expostulations, and Margaret stood at the foot of the steps, cursing herself for a fool at having been so easily trapped. The stench of the airless hole rose about her till she felt she must stifle or be sick. A little trickle of water was audible, and she wondered if this were Stair's revenge, to drown her like a rat in a trap.

She put her hand to her breast under her cloak and felt the hardness of the ivory press into her soft flesh. Fool, thrice fool! Here was she imprisoned and hopeless and Piero in some deadly peril. Her eyes by now had grown accustomed to the darkness, which the smoking torch barely illuminated, and on a stone ledge at the end of the cellar she saw what at first she thought was a

bundle of rags. She went a few steps nearer and gave an exclamation to see that it was the body of a man. The straw rustled, and he turned over so that she could see his face dimly under the tangle of matted hair, a skeleton face with a black beard and eyes that burned with fever in their hollow sockets. A little draught made the torch flare, casting a light on her face and the man threw out two bony hands as if to push her away.

"Go, go! I will dream no more," he muttered in a hoarse, cracked voice, and then she knew him.

With one cry: "Piero! Piero? Don't you know me?" she was kneeling on the wet floor before him.

He shook his head.

"You are only a dream. I have dreamed of you so often and for so long that I can bear no more."

She flung herself onto the straw beside him, gathered him into her arms and held his head tight against her breast.

"Can you feel *now* that I am no dream?"

"I can feel the beating of your heart," he said slowly; "the rise and fall of your breath, the warmth of you. It cannot be a dream."

Then he freed himself roughly from her clasp and drew away.

"*Sacramento!*" he gasped. "You, and the horror of you here, stench, foulness, vermin, rats, toads, cold, damp, filth! I am not fit for you to touch, to be near!"

"Beloved," she whispered, "I ask no better heaven than to hold you in my arms."

She held out her arms and he slipped back into them like a frightened child, his head on her breast. So they stayed, without word or movement till at last he spoke.

"The strong beating of your heart——"

"All for you, dear heart, till it beats no more."

He lifted his head and looked into her face.

"Not the King?"

"I have loved you and none but you since that dawn when you held me to your heart."

"And the King?"

"Is my friend, but no more; nor could ever be my lover."

He sat up and took her hands fiercely in his.

"But if he loves you——"

"He does not. Waste no more time in speaking of it."

"*Madre di Dio!* I forgot! How came you here? Will Stair torture you too?"

"Torture?" she cried in agony. "Has he dared torture *you?*"

"If this place, without light or air or dryness, barely enough bread and water to keep a flicker of life in me, be not torture——"

"He has kept you alive then. Is he afraid?"

Piero gave a little cracked laugh.

"Afraid? No. But the dead don't speak."

"Then you must fool him, make him think you'll speak."

"He knows I'll not. Unless——"

He looked at her with eyes of horror before he ended.

"Unless that's why he's got you here, to make me speak or—— How did he trap you?"

"He tried to get me yesterday, but I'd not come. Then to-day a messenger brought me the rose I'd given you."

"Then you came?"

"I knew you would not have sent it unless you needed me, or else that you had been captured and it taken from you."

"They took it from me when they brought me here and stripped me. I had worn it next my heart since that night at Orange when you said you'd be my friend."

"And the Borgia ring?"

"Everything, even Roxane, is gone."

She slipped her own ring off and onto his finger, too thin to hold it.

"You must have mine in case—in case there's no other way."

He shook his head and put the ring back on her hand.

"No, that's a coward's way. They shall no more make me kill myself than they can make me speak. The door! They have come to take you."

The door creaked a little open and the man peered in.

"Five minutes more, Mademoiselle—no longer."

He locked the door again.

"How were you captured?" cried Margaret. "No, the future's of more import than the past. How shall I free you?"

"You cannot. Stair dare not let me go now."

"He shall not dare to keep you."

"Drowned men tell no tales."

"You said he needed your speech. Of what?"

"The lost papers, my mission here, Spain and the King's plans."

"Your mission here, what was it?"

"Naught now. I came to see the Regent, to keep in touch with Cellamare, the Duc de Maine and others plotting against Orleans. But when I found their plan was murder, I'd no more of it."

"What was their plan? Quick! Quick! We've so little time!"

"They've bought the Regent's Flemish mistress, Ann Daveloote. The night de Guise, a young cousin of Maine's, commanded the guard, she was to stab the Regent in his bed, while de Guise captured the young King and proclaimed Philip V King of France."

"Did the plot fail?"

"No, 'tis only put off. De Guise was ill, but his next turn on guard maybe they will try again. But that's not the King's way nor mine. I told them so, and walked out. Margaret, Margaret," and he caught her suddenly in his arms, "if the King loves you, needs you—— He has never been friends with a woman as with you. He must marry."

"There's nothing, no one but you. All other loves and loyalties are nothing beside my love for you. I'll sacrifice all else, all others for your sake."

"Sweetest, that's a woman, and I love you for it, but honour comes first and loyalty—the King before all."

"To you before me? To me before you? No, impossible!"

"I left Avignon without bidding you good-bye because I believed and do still believe that the King needs you, and if he does I must give up heaven on earth for his sake."

"And for me?"

"Have you not also sworn love and loyalty to him before all? And if he asks for more than friendship, dare you deny him what little happiness lies in your power to give him, who deserves so much and has had so little?"

She sat still, looking before her into the shadows; she saw herself and the King beside the woodland pool, heard him say: "If in the future I were to ask still more——" and herself reply: "You need but to ask."

She turned a stricken face to Piero.

"As you will," she whispered. "Do with me what you will."

The key grated in the lock, and she clung to him as if she could never bear to let him go.

"This hour at least is ours," he said quickly. "If we

never meet again you know that I shall love no other till I die."

Their lips met once, in a last long kiss of love, despair and farewell, and she stumbled blindly up the steps as the door was bolted, leaving Piero alone in the darkness.

CHAPTER VII

THE DUKE OF ORLEANS' PRICE

At the end of a long passage Margaret felt Marie's supporting arm taken from her; she was pushed through a door, which was locked, and she found herself alone in a small room with a heavily barred window looking out on to a blank wall. She heard Marie's cries grow fainter as she was dragged away, and seeing that escape was impossible, she sat down on the solitary chair and hid her face in her hands, all thought of her own danger swallowed in memory of Piero's. She saw him again that morning at the Pont du Garde, fresh from the river, the fierce beautiful wild animal that had never known the bars of a cage or the lash of the tamer's whip. She heard him say: "I can imagine nothing worse than to have to remain dirty. . . . Pain, illness, starvation, thirst, I should hate them all." And now this torture—damp, darkness, stench, filth, vermin, starvation, thirst, and the inquisition of questioning that prevented sleep or any rest. She rose to her feet, went to the window and stood staring out into the gathering dusk with unseeing eyes. Caught, trapped, bars and the whip-lash, but tamed, no! In the broken body burned a spirit as free and proud as ever; beat a heart as passionately loyal and devoted as man's could be—and that heart was hers, hers and the King's.

She turned at the sound of the opening door, and a tall man came in, masked, and muffled in a black cloak.

"Have you come to torture me, Lord Stair," she said,

"as you have tortured the Prince of Este? But I think you will not dare."

He unmasked and sat down on the table, smiling.

"I leave the chair for you, since our interview may be a long one."

"I think not. You need something from me."

"Which you are ready to refuse without conditions. Wait till you have heard them. Have you nothing that you want in exchange?"

"I'll not stoop to bargain with you. I demand the instant release of the Prince of Este."

"Sadly crude, my dear cousin. That is not diplomacy."

"If you're a diplomat, thank God it's not! If you do not release your prisoner by noon to-morrow——"

"Faith! I'll release him if you'll but do me one small favour."

"And that is?"

He rose from the table and came close to her.

"A very little thing, your only way to save your lover. He shall be free and in your arms by noon to-morrow."

"What guarantee have I?"

"My word. Gad! I wither under that glance!"

"The favour?"

"To tell me why he's here and what's the plot he's engaged on."

"How should I know, since you do not?"

"A woman's as adept at worming out a secret as she is at revealing it."

"And if I know naught, or knowing, will not reveal it?"

He caught her arm in a fierce grip, and his face was so near hers that she felt his breath on her cheek.

"If not," he said in a low voice, "there are means to make him speak that I have not yet tried."

"He will not speak."

"When the body's beyond breaking point with fever and hunger and thirst and filth; when the mind's broken, too, with mental torture and want of sleep, then the will breaks too, and the tongue is loosed. There's a new torture he'll have now—the knowledge that you are in my power."

She caught his hand from her arm and flung him from her so violently that he reeled back against the wall.

"Now," she said in a voice as low and tense as his, "I can believe the tales I heard in childhood. Not without deserving it did your grandfather wear a body as crooked as his mind, and live to see one son poisoned, a daughter poinard her husband in their marriage bed, and one grandson slay another! Or was he not your grandfather, no father to the son born by his wife, the Witch of Endor whose black art was said to raise the devil and bring him as lover to her arms? Her son, blackened with treachery, dyed with the blood of the men and women of Glencoe, he was fit father for you!"

She paused breathless, and he spoke, snarling:

"Is it wise, girl, to force me——"

"I *will* force you," she cried, sweeping across the room towards him: "I will force you to do justice! I'll leave no stone unturned! I'll neither rest nor let others rest till the Prince of Este is a free man again!"

"Splendid!" he murmured. "The tigress attempting the rescue of her mate. You should have trod the boards of Drury Lane in Dryden's tragedies."

"Tigress? Yes, I'll be a wild beast and know no fear nor mercy till I have you in my power and force his release."

"You forget that you too are in my power."

"Unlock that door and let me go."

"If not?"

She laughed scornfully.

"If I'm not home within the hour I left orders that Lady Mary should send to your Lordship to ask where I could be found."

He bit his lip and moved towards the door.

"To-morrow——" he said.

"To-morrow's dusk shall see the Prince of Este a free man again." Then, as he opened the door and she went out she turned her blazing eyes on his pale face, all glistening with sweat.

"And if he is not whole and sound in life and limb, may God help you, if you are not indeed beyond His help."

On her return Margaret went straight to Lady Mary, and in quick terse sentences told her all.

"Then you love him?" the old lady asked.

"Now, and always."

"What would you have me do?"

"See Lord Stair, Aunt Mary; use your influence with him. You have a position, are well known at the Court of St. James's."

" 'Twould indeed be strange were I not to try and save your betrothed, Meg. Sure that's the Prince of Este's only claim on Hanoverian interest. Ian shall take a note to Stair now."

Ian returned an hour later to say that the Ambassador had gone to the Palais Royal, but would wait on her Ladyship to-morrow morning.

Morning came at last, grey, with an icy wind that bid fair to turn the rain to snow, and Jean refused to let her mistress leave her bed.

"Then I'll see him here," snapped the old lady. "Bring me that new cap and the velvet gown with grey fur. No

need to be dowdy, if one's old and sick. Meg, ye'd best bide here. Sit by the fire and say naught unless you must."

Stair was shown in a moment later, bowed to Margaret, and, taking Lady Mary's hand, condoled over her illness.

"Sit down and let's get to business," she said bluntly. "Meg tells me you hold her betrothed a prisoner."

"Betrothed?" He raised eyebrows as he offered his snuff-box. "I was not aware of it. The prisoner to whom I suppose you refer is a noted Jacobite agent; in fact the most damnably able and daring of all their spies. My duty to his gracious Majesty King George compels me to capture such enemies whenever and wherever possible."

"Duty!" snorted she. "Is that what makes you starve and torture the lad?"

"Torture, my dear cousin, is an unpleasant word."

"And a vastly more unpleasant fact, as I'd like to make you experience at the moment. Are you letting the lad go free?"

He dropped his mask of suavity and spoke curtly.

"I am not, unless under the condition I mentioned to your niece. I have captured one of King George's most dangerous enemies, the right hand of the Pretender, without whom he's crippled. Think you I'm fool enough to let him go for a girl's whim?"

He stood up.

"If that's all you have to say, Lady Mary, I'll be gone."

"It's not. Sit down again and hear what I have to say."

She was sitting up, her thin aquiline face under the lace nightcap pale against the curtains of the four-poster, her eyes keen as those of a hawk, her ringed, wrinkled hands clenched on the satin coverlet.

"That's not all," she continued. "If you'll not let him go, 'twill not rest there. I'm not a nobody. I'll appeal to Lord Stanhope, Lord Townsend—both friends of mine —to King George himself."

"Do you then desire to share the experience of Lady Nithsdale when she went last spring to present her petition for mercy on her husband and His Most Gracious Majesty dragged her on her knees the full length of the ante-room before he succeeded in beating her hands from his coat? Not a pretty position for a *young* woman."

"Finish your sentence; and worse for an old one. No, I'll not stand that. But there are other ways."

"None that you'd stoop to. I've told your niece the only way to free the Prince, and if she'll not take it the fault is hers."

He turned at the door with a little snarling laugh.

"Much ado about nothing, for to reveal the mission will belike not hurt the Pretender *now*."

"He's not dead?"

"At the point of death, if not already dead."

"Rumour has killed him before."

"This is no idle rumour, but bald fact. His mother has got the greatest surgeon in Paris for him."

"Guérin?"

"Yes, he's gone south without being told who is his patient, but such is the secrecy of Jacobites, or if you prefer the activity of my servants, that in their next editions the Dutch, English and French Gazettes will publish full details of patient, illness and proposed operation, which 'tis thought will come too late."

"You think he'll die under it?"

"Most like. 'Tis both dangerous and damnably painful and he's no reserve of strength. So perhaps after all that clause, 'Beyond the Alps,' may prove but a dead letter. And after sunset to-day," he added, looking at

Margaret, "my offer to release the Prince of Este no longer holds good."

After he had shut the door behind him Margaret went across to her Aunt and kissed her.

"Thank you for what you have done."

"It was useless."

"As I feared."

"Where are you going?"

Margaret paused with her hand on the door.

"I cannot tell you, but if I am not home by sunset will you enquire from Lord Stair of my welfare?"

She went downstairs slowly and into the Chinese cabinet, leaving the door open behind her, and stood looking into the desolate garden, the north wind whirling the dead leaves across the sodden grass, where one damp and draggled blackbird was trying to extricate a worm.

One hope was left and only one—the Duke of Orleans. She must manage to see him, offer to reveal the plot against his life in exchange for Piero's freedom. But how gain admittance? There was a step outside, and she turned to call Ian and order the coach, when Jules came in.

She ran to him with hands outstretched.

"Jules! Jules! The one person in the world that I have been longing and praying for!"

"Charming! But to what do I owe this unusually ecstatic welcome?" he asked with his crooked smile.

She drew him in, shut the door and told him.

"When you came I was just about to order the coach and go to the Palais Royal."

"But at this hour of the morning? You are mad!"

He took her arm and turned her to face the window, then shook his head.

"That dress, but no! Certainly not. Something gay, with colour. And your cheeks—colour, too, if you con-

tinue to look as pale after a good dinner. I'll wager you've eaten nothing for the past twenty-four hours. Folly, but rank folly, when you need all your strength, all your beauty. We dine in an hour; order the coach half an hour later and *vogue la galère!* Now go and see that Marie makes you lovelier than ever before."

He looked critically at Margaret as she came into the dining-room in a gown of blood-red brocade turned back from a petticoat of cloth of gold, garnets sparkling like drops of blood in her dark hair, round her white throat and in the lace at her breast.

"That goes!" he nodded. "Now a good dinner and wine. My orders, and to be obeyed."

To her amazement she found no difficulty in obeying, and as she drank the wine he himself poured out for her a little colour came back to her white face.

"How is Clarice?"

"She is in Avignon, and sent you a message of love."

"The King! Is it true that his life is despaired of and that Guérin has gone south to operate on him?"

"Grand Dieu! How did you hear of that? It is a secret of the grave."

"Lord Stair."

He looked down, crumbling his bread with nervous fingers.

"If his spies are so good, what wonder that all our plans fall shattered about us? He is well served because he pays well and never forgives failure."

"Alan Fraser! I had forgotten about him. Where is he?"

"He arrived with me to-day. The King has given me money for his passage back to Scotland."

"He's not been to Stair?"

"Did you not hear? He is converted, and sees the error of his ways."

"How? I cannot believe that he would ever be rid of his fanaticism."

"Yet you know the King."

Margaret remained silent a moment before she answered slowly:

"Yes, I remember that day when Père de St. Etienne told us about Luc Roche that I wondered how the King could be more interested in the repentance of a spy than his own chance of regaining his kingdom."

"The King is a Christian," said Jules drily. "Perhaps Fraser had not before met one like that—a real saint."

"Tell me."

He shrugged his thin shoulders.

"You expect too much, Mademoiselle, if you think I can explain to you the cause of Fraser's repentance. Ask Père de St. Etienne; he will tell you the grace of God, but for me I say that the King was the human reason. He visited Fraser at the inn, you know."

"I did not know. I did not see the King before we left."

"He rode out several times to see him when convalescent. I fancy that Fraser's long illness and his two narrow escapes from death—the second owed to the King—gave him time to think, but it was the King's goodness which brought about his entire change of view."

"He has become a Catholic?"

"Merely a Christian, worshipping Christ, who sacrificed Himself for man, rather than a bloodthirsty god who sacrificed man to satisfy the prejudices of Calvin."

Margaret nodded.

"I too was brought up to hear about that god—a god of cruelty and vengeance rather than love and mercy."

"Fraser saw the King's nobility and generosity, saving, keeping and visiting one who had plotted his death. Fraser saw this, the kindness as of the good Samaritan, a forgiveness almost divine in its selflessness—and suddenly the ice broke. He flung himself at the King's feet, tears pouring down his face; would have kissed the King's feet, had the King not prevented him; confessed his sins and errors, and promised a free and full amendment of his ways. He laid his life in the King's hands to do with as he deemed best; begged him to employ him in the most dangerous designs against his enemies. The King raised him to his feet, and smiled at him: 'Against mine enemies, Master Fraser, I will undertake nothing, unless they force me by hurt against the Catholic religion. But, if you will do my pleasure, as I believe you desire to, you will travel to Paris with Monsieur de Sarci and thence make your way as quickly as you may to Dundee, where I am told you are sure of a warmer welcome than I myself can command wherever I go.' "

"You were there and heard this?"

"I rode with the King on that last visit, and now Fraser is in Paris on his way home."

"Tell him, then, to hasten. Nay, I will give you two letters to hand to him—one from Master Forbes, one from Elsie, that will make him start as soon as may be."

Jules rose and held out his hand.

"I hear the coach. We will start as soon as you are ready."

Margaret caught his hand tight in hers.

"How you have made the time pass. What should I have done but for you? But if aught should go wrong—if I should fail——"

"You will not. Be yourself, but think not of yourself and use every weapon."

"If the audience is granted, you will come in with me?"

He laid his other hand on hers, and his crooked smile was very tender.

"Foolish child! Did you dream I should allow you to go in alone?"

They waited in silence in the ante-room at the Palais Royal while people came and went, and presently a young man in the uniform of the King's Guards lounged up to Jules with a curious glance at Margaret.

"Are you on duty, Monsieur de Guise?"

"I command the guard to-night. Can I do anything for you, Monsieur le Marquis?"

"Obtain for us an interview with his Grace of Orleans as soon as possible."

"For the beautiful eyes of Mademoiselle," bowed de Guise, and a moment later came back and beckoned to them.

As they entered the Moorish room a tall woman came out, with the golden hair, blue eyes and voluptuous curves of a Rubens' Venus, her great white shoulders bare above her furred gown of crimson velvet.

The Duke of Orleans lay on the divan, covered, in spite of the scented airless heat of the dim room, with a rug of ermine skins, yellow against the dead-white of his face. He held a languid hand to Jules and cast a bored glance in Margaret's direction.

"Monseigneur," said Jules, coming straight to the point, "we have a favour to ask of you. The release of a prisoner."

"I know naught of the Bastille, Monsieur le Marquis. See the governor."

"A prisoner held by Lord Stair."

"Tiens! That is still less to do with me. Go to him."

"We have come to you for justice."

"A thousand thanks for the compliment! But that commodity is too rare to be so easily obtained."

Jules looked at Margaret, who came forward.

"Monseigneur, from you one looks for generosity, not bargains."

"I have heard that voice before. Do I know you?"

She took off her mask, and he lay back among his pillows with a little laugh.

"The vixen of the *bal masqué! Dieu!* I did not see then how beautiful you were."

She flung herself on her knees and caught his hand.

"Your Grace, I do beseech you, by all you ever loved, to grant me this favour."

"I have loved none but myself."

"Have you never loved so that you were ready to give yourself, your body, heart and soul, to suffer the utmost torture, death itself, to save your beloved?"

"*Ma foi!* I'd give anything, endure most things, to save myself."

"Do you fear death?"

He stirred uneasily.

"No need."

She stood up and released his hand, which had lain inert in hers.

"Ah, but if there *were* need for you to fear it, if, within twelve hours, before another day dawns, your body that you love so was cold and stiff in death?"

"Peace, woman!" his voice, usually low and toneless, rang sharp: "Monsieur de Sarci, take her away. *Elle m'ennuit!*"

He turned away his face, and the heavy white lids drooped.

"If you send me away," said Margaret, "you sign your own death-warrant for to-night. Is your soul pre-

pared to stand at the judgment seat of God before midnight?"

His eyes opened wide.

"Would you make me afraid?"

"No need. Fear is your master already; he stands behind you in council chamber and banqueting hall, rides with you hunting; yes, and lies besides you on the pillow."

He sat up, his hands clutching the velvet gown that was the blue of his eyes.

"Are you a witch?"

"I can foretell some of the future."

"What of mine?"

"What I have told you, unless you grant me this favour—a little favour that will cost you naught, but, granted, will save your life."

"How that?"

"I know of a plot to kill you this very night."

He flung back the ermine and put his feet to the ground.

"My negroes and the guard!"

"No one can save you," said Margaret; "nothing will save you but the granting of my favour."

"You dare bargain with me? I'll make you speak."

"Never—unless Lord Stair's prisoner is released."

"Who is he? Why does Stair hold him?"

"The Prince of Este."

"The Jacobite spy! Then 'tis no affair of mine. 'Beyond the Alps with the Pretender' are my orders."

"You would fain sign the treaty with the English Government?"

"'Tis good as signed."

"You know my aunt, Monseigneur, Lady Mary Gordon, one of the great Whig ladies at St. James's?"

"What's she to do with d'Este?"

"This, Monsieur le duc d'Orleans, that the Prince of Este loves me, and I him, and if 'tis known at St. James's that he's been foully done to death by Stair, and with your Grace's knowledge and connivance, 'twill not increase the British Government's favour to you, on which you count."

He sat silent, looking before him, undecided, till she touched his shoulder and he started.

"Fear," she said, "not of what *may* be, but of what *will* be, unless you buy my speech."

He clapped his hands; one of the negro mutes appeared, and in answer to signs brought pen and ink. The Regent wrote, sanded the paper, sealed it with his signet and held it to Margaret, who gave it to Jules.

"Now speak," said Orleans.

"Not till the Prince is free."

"You distrust me. Why then should I trust you?"

"If Monsieur le Marquis will take the coach, deliver that paper in person to Lord Stair——"

"I was about to suggest it," said Jules. "But you, Mademoiselle?"

"With Monseigneur's permission I will remain here till you return with the news that the Prince of Este is free. Then I'll speak, but not before."

Jules looked doubtful, but at a glance from her left the room.

"A thousand pardons, Mademoiselle, that you have stood so long," said the Regent, rising to his feet. "On those cushions of green and gold your beauty will be as strong wine after water."

He sat down beside her.

"Are you not afraid to be left alone with me?"

"I have room for fear only for the one I love."

"He is to be envied Your beauty and your courage, it is a rare combination."

"What is beauty of body but a little gleam gone as life fades?"

"Look at me."

She looked at the strange blue eyes, dark with fear and desire under the arched brows, the high-bridged nose, the small, full mouth, the lips startlingly red in the dead pallor of the face, and her flesh crept.

He smiled, and a note of life stole into the toneless voice.

"You are afraid."

"Not of you, but of the evil behind you."

He looked quickly over his shoulder, then back at her.

"You are in my power."

"Monsieur de Sarci returns."

He gave a low laugh.

"He will not return for an hour or more, and before then——"

"No, for your life hangs on my speech."

"You can speak afterwards to save the man who has taught you love."

"The dead cannot speak."

"You are armed?"

She touched the Borgia ring on her left hand.

"There's death in that for us both unless your honour——"

"Thanks for your belief in it! Was I not right to call you wild beast?"

He rose, flung himself again on the divan, drew the ermine to his chin and closed his eyes. So they remained; it seemed an eternity.

The arabesque of the Moorish lattice had shown black against the light outside; now it was faint rose-brown in the dim gleam of the silver lamp against the night. Once the door opened and Margaret thought Jules had returned.

A blonde head and one white shoulder appeared and withdrew, then silence again.

An icy hand clutched at Margaret's heart. Till sunset, Stair had said, the offer remained open. He would not strike till then. But had she been too late? Was Piero even now dead, his body washed down the swollen Seine, battered, unrecognisable, untraceable?

Again the door opened and Margaret knew Jules' footstep. She dared not look at his face, but kept her eyes fixed on the Duke's and saw his lids lift slowly.

"You may speak," said Jules. "The Prince of Este is at my house and safe."

The Duke of Orleans came suddenly to life—keen, alert, intent, firing sharp questions at Margaret as she told him of the plot. As she finished he clapped his hands and the two negroes came in, naked but for their striped loin-cloths, each with a naked blade in his hand.

For a moment Margaret thought that she and Jules were to be killed, but did not greatly care, since Piero was safe; then the Duke spoke to Jules.

"As you and Mademoiselle go out will you tell Monsieur de Guise that I desire his presence?"

The door opened before Jules reached it and Anne Daveloote stood there.

"Come, Ann," said the Duke of Orleans, in a voice soft as the purring of a cat, "in one moment more I shall be entirely alone."

Margaret looked back as she and Jules crossed the anteroom and saw Monsieur de Guise shut the door of the Moorish room behind him.

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH AND THE KING

Piero felt the touch of smooth cool linen against his cheek, the softness of a feather pillow under his head, the soft smoothness of a silk coverlet on his hand, and kept his eyes firmly shut. One must delay waking as long as possible when waking meant a return to the realities of cold, wet, filth, vermin, starvation and mental torture. The sound of an opening door, however, brought him sharply awake, and when he saw round him heavy curtains of red damask, and through their opening a spacious airy room, with bare polished floor and panelled walls, he remembered.

The curtains parted discreetly, and the smiling face of André, Jules' valet, appeared.

"Monsieur le Prince is awake! Good! Monsieur le Marquis hopes that you will ask for anything further that you desire."

He drew back the curtains and put down a tray laden with fresh rolls and butter, honey, roast partridge and salad, and a tall jug of *café au lait*.

"If Monsieur le Prince prefers wine, or venison, anything else? Monsieur le Marquis is regretfully compelled to go out, but bids me present his compliments and say that he will be returned for dinner if you care to join him. If not, to rest. But everything as Monsieur le Prince prefers."

Piero smiled at the pleasant young face and attacked the partridge.

"This is heaven, André, after hell. But *diable!* What am I to do about clothes?"

"Your clothes are here, Monseigneur. Monsieur de Sarci found out where you had lodged, and I fetched them this morning. But if I might venture to make a suggestion, they have a little lost their bloom from travelling and neglect during Monseigneur's unfortunate absence, but my brother, who is tailor to the highest *noblesse,* could by dinner-time provide Monseigneur with something worthier of his rank and beauty."

Piero laughed grimly and put a hand to his face.

"*Bacco!* I am now so accustomed to a beard, filth, vermin, everything that is of the devil. Did you shave me last night? I dimly remember arriving with Monsieur de Sarci, a bath, the joy of heaven, something to eat and drink and then sleep. That is all. Beauty indeed! I must be ugly as sin!"

André presented him with a mirror and studied him critically.

"I must a little better trim Monseigneur's hair, but when he is shaved, bathed, and dressed in a new suit, he will no longer know himself."

When André had gone Piero lay a little while looking through the open window into the clear, sunlit morning. He knew nothing as yet of the reason of his release, for he had been so dazed last night by the sudden turn of fortune that during the drive in the coach, wrapped in Jules' cloak, he had been able to do no more than mutter a few incoherent words of gratitude. He remembered now that Jules had seemed unaccountably nervous, restless and distracted, had scarcely stayed to hand him over to André before rushing back to the coach, which had started again at a gallop.

And Margaret? He had not liked to ask André about

her, for he did not even know if she and her aunt were here or not. He was certain that somehow she had been the means of his release, and he was free. With that, he drifted again into delicious sleep.

As he entered the *salle-à-manger* an unwonted awkwardness came over him at the thought of meeting Jules, their old dislike and jealousy, their quarrel, and now this tremendous debt of gratitude. The room was empty, but Jules came in a moment later with an apology, and they sat down.

"I see André has fitted you out with something," Jules said, with his little mocking smile. "I congratulate you, *mon Prince!* For one who has been imprisoned, starved and tortured for weeks, you are a miracle of appearance."

"Thanks to your admirable André, Monsieur le Marquis."

"He is a treasure, is he not?"

"But thanks still more to yourself. Impossible to express my gratitude——"

"Never attempt the impossible. Besides, it is not to me you are indebted."

"I must differ from you there, Marquis. But if you prefer me to leave my gratitude unexpressed, I must at any rate compel you to accept an apology."

"Compel!"

"The word is ill-chosen. But I must ask your forgiveness for that incident at the *Nid au Bois.* I confess I was unpardonable, both in my behaviour to Mademoiselle Ogilvie and yourself. How explain? I will not try, but only beg you to accept my apology."

"It is unnecessary. The incident is wiped out."

"You increase my debt to you."

Jules looked at him steadily, twisting the stem of his glass in restless fingers.

"Prince of Este," he said, "we both served the King; with both of us loyalty to him has come before all other human relationships—with one exception in my case. Can we not then be friends? God knows there has been enough dissension, jealousy, quarrels and hatred among the Jacobites without our adding our mite."

Piero held out his hand, which Jules held an instant then asked abruptly:

"How were you captured when you had always seemed to bear a charmed life?"

"The charm had broken, it appears. The last time Stair's men caught me in the spring and I escaped I had a queer foreboding: 'What will happen if my luck does not hold next time?' You know the reason of my mission?"

"Unofficially, that it was connected with the Spanish plot against the Regent."

"I knew, as you do, that Cardinal Alberoni was scheming to place Philip V on the French throne and using Prince Cellamare as his intermediary with the Duc de Maine and other malcontents. But I found behind these, others—smaller, meaner, less scrupulous. I was present at one of their meetings—perhaps they had not meant to let me into the secret—and when I heard the plot that Ann Daveloote should stab Orleans as he lay within her arms, and that de Guise should make the guards proclaim Philip V across the Regent's body and—who knows?—most like across the body of the sickly young king also, I rose, said that such was not my way nor King James's, and so departed."

"That was scarcely wise."

"I know it now, but then anger blinded me, at the thought of the King's name mixed with such murder and treachery."

"I wonder they let you go. One of them must

have betrayed you to Stair to save their own secrets."

"It is likely, but my capture was my own fault. I walked home one black night carelessly, without watching or listening, for I did not greatly care; which was wrong, seeing that I was on the King's business. They caught me unawares from a dark alley; a blow on the head knocked me senseless and I woke in that hell. Was it in the Embassy?"

"No, or we might have found it harder to obtain your release. You were in a little house which Stair rents by the river in the poor quarter, French territory, where the Regent's orders are supreme. Meantime your glass is empty."

Piero rose and lifted his full glass.

"The King!"

"Pray heaven there's still a King at Avignon!"

"What do you mean?"

"Of course you have not heard. The King was at the point of death. The Queen Mother has despatched Guérin to operate; the last hope, if indeed he be in time."

Piero's glass shattered into a thousand fragments at his feet, while the wine trickled like a stream of blood across the floor. He swayed, caught at the table, and Jules gave an exclamation of annoyance as he pushed him back into his chair.

"I was a fool to tell you so abruptly. Sit still and drink."

"I must go. I must ride for Avignon at once."

"Not till to-morrow, *mon Prince*. Another night's rest and you may be fit for easy stages."

"May I borrow a horse?"

Jules gave him a sidelong glance.

"You shall choose one in the stables. But first your dinner. *Ma foi! my* mission at the moment, it appears, is

to make unwilling people eat and drink. To-day, you, yesterday Mademoiselle Ogilvie."

"Was she here?" asked Piero looking down. "Was it she who sent you to me? Is she with her aunt in Paris?"

"Too many questions at once, *mon cher!* Yes, it is to her you owe your freedom. The rest she can tell you when you meet."

Piero began intently to trace a pattern on the polished table.

"I know not if we shall meet," he said in a low voice, "seeing I ride to Avignon to-morrow. If not, will you express my gratitude to her? *Dio mio!* That is impossible. It is inexpressible, but you understand."

He lifted his head to find Jules gazing at him intently under drawn brows.

"*Do* I understand?" he asked. "Perhaps you will explain when we meet in Avignon, whither I return to my sister."

"She is better?"

"She has but a few weeks to live?"

"There are moments when one could envy her, but that would be cowardly, and you, Monsieur de Sarci, are no coward."

Jules rose with an attempt at a smile.

"A thousand thanks, Prince. And now the stables."

As Piero followed Jules through the garden the thought of the loss of Roxane felt the last straw in his burden—to renounce Margaret now that he knew she loved him, to ride south with the possibility of finding the King dead when he arrived, and to fancy Roxane, his inseparable companion, perhaps starved, neglected, ill-treated, it was too much! The groom opened the stable door; Jules took Piero's arm and led him in.

"Take your choice, *mon cher.*"

Then, at the sound of her master's voice Roxane was

whinnying over the half-door of her stall and rubbing her velvet muzzle ecstatically against his cheek and hair. He turned to Jules with eyes suspiciously bright and Jules answered the unspoken question.

"The easiest thing in the world. My groom has a cousin at the English Embassy; he found out that the people with whom you had left Roxane, despairing of your return, were selling her to pay for her keep. *Et la voici!*"

As they left the stables a man rode in on a tired horse, dismounted and handed Jules a packet, on the seal of which Piero saw the triple tiara and the keys of Peter.

"News from Avignon?" he asked as Jules hurriedly tore open the packet.

"Yes, the operation has been performed. The King has so little strength, but one continues to hope. Monsignor Salviati writes of the King's amazing courage under the agony he has had to bear from the knife: 'Guérin assures me, as the simple truth, that he had never before met with such endurance.' But read it, for he says the King keeps asking for you, is anxious about your safety, having been without news for so long."

"I will start now."

"It will soon be dark. At dawn to-morrow you will be better able to push on after another twelve hours of good food and sleep. I must go and see if the Queen Mother is at Chaillot to give her the news. Go into the salon. There is a good fire there."

As Piero climbed the stairs slowly an overwhelming lassitude submerged him, the inevitable reaction after the weeks of physical misery and mental torture and the relief that the King had at any rate survived the shock of the knife. The twilight of the short October day was beginning to fall, and as he entered the salon he could not see very clearly with the flicker of the wood-fire and the grey light that filtered between the heavy curtains.

A woman rose from a chair by the fire and he murmured an apology, then saw that it was Margaret, and they were in each other's arms. They clung in silence, her head on his breast, his cheek against her hair, while the dying day grew dimmer and the shadows pressed closer.

She lifted her head and took his face between her hands.

"I am a little less ruffian than when you last saw me," he smiled.

"But you are thin—horribly thin and pale."

"Do not wound my poor vanity any more. André has done his best with me. My debt to Jules de Sarci is unpayable. Mine to you——"

"Between us two, Piero, there can be neither debt nor gratitude—only love."

"Yet from me you have had nothing, but I from you everything."

"Does that, too, hurt your vanity?" she smiled at him. "For me I would gladly be nothing, have nothing, but accept all from your hands."

"Perhaps that is because you are a woman, I a man."

"Would you have it otherwise?"

"It is one of the few things I can be glad of at the moment. That, the news that the King's operation is over, and that de Sarci has saved Roxane for me. I start for Avignon to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"At dawn."

He drew her to the chair beside the fire and sat at her feet with his head against her knee, her hands in his, under his cheek.

"It is best so," he said; "to be with you longer, to know that you love me as I you, and that never in this world can you be mine, I could not bear it."

"For this one little hour let us forget," she whispered. "Our little gleam between the shadows."

It was dark, and the fire had sunk to grey ashes, when a tap at the door was followed by Marie's voice.

"Miladi sups now, and will you come to her room? *Mon Dieu!* It is dark here; I will fetch candles."

"I do not need the lights, Marie. I will come."

"This is the end then," said Piero; "I shall not see you again."

"Not the end, for our love is immortal. If we never meet again or meet only like strangers, you will know that I shall never change, never love you less, nor any other as I love you."

"The King will never know."

"He will have my faithful love and loyalty."

She took his hand and slipped her ring on it.

"Take this of mine. None will know 'tis not your own. And for me I have the ivory rose you wore next your heart. It shall be on mine till I am dead."

Piero suddenly caught her in his arms with a passion that was savage.

"To see you the mother of another man's sons! How can I bear that?"

She gave a long shuddering sob, took his face between her hands, kissed him again and again on the lips and ran from the room.

2

It was a dreary November day; the fog lay heavy in the Rhone valley and clung in white wreaths about the grey rocks of the Provençal hills when Piero rode into Avignon. In the hall of the Entraigues Palace he met Mar and Guérin.

"How goes it with the King?" he asked bluntly.

The great surgeon shrugged his shoulders and threw out his hands.

"For me, I have done all that is possible, but there is

no reserve of strength. He keeps asking for you, Monsieur le Prince; I think you will do him more good than medicine. He must not be tired, above all, not worry."

"A counsel of perfection. May I go to him now?"

"You come from Paris?" asked Mar. "We must at all cost keep from him, till he is in a condition to bear the news, the fact that he is to be compelled immediately to leave Avignon and withdraw to Italy."

"As he wrote to the Pope last June such exile will indeed inflict a fatal stroke on his interests," said Piero. "If your Grace had nothing but my possible indiscretions on that subject to worry you, your lot would certainly be a peaceful one."

In the little writing-room François started as if he had seen a ghost and almost embraced Piero for joy.

"I think he is asleep," he whispered. "But go in and wait till he wakes."

He opened the door softly, and Piero tip-toed in. The room was dimly lit by half a dozen candles, two of them on the table by the bed, and Piero sat down and looked between the drawn-back curtains. The greyhound at the foot of the bed lifted sad eyes, then laid his head down again on his outstretched paws. The King lay straight and still on his back, only one low pillow under his head, his hands crossed on the folded sheet over his breast. He looked like one dead and laid out for burial. The soft dark hair clung in damp curls to the forehead; there were great hollows in temples and cheeks; the bones of cheek and jaw were sharp as knives; the nose, with its fine bridge and delicate nostrils, seemed to have grown larger; the curling black lashes and arched brows were a startling contrast to the parchment pallor of brow and cheek.

In one of those moments which, in a flash, reveal the young as they will be when old, the old as they will look

when dead, Piero saw James fifty years in the future—sunken eyes, beaked nose, jutting lower lip and chin. Then icy fear seized him that even now James was dead; not a flutter stirred the thin nostrils and closed lips, nor the faintest heart-beat was visible under those crossed hands. He looked again at him, and found the long hazel eyes open, huge in their cavernous sockets, and the blue lips moved:

"Piero!"

Piero caught the cold white hands and pressed them again and again to his lips, then they clasped his head and drew it down to the King's breast, so that he felt the faint rise and fall of his slow breaths, the beating of his heart, feeble and intermittent as the fluttering wings of a dying moth.

"Piero," whispered the King, "you are safe. Is all well with you?"

"Since I am with you. And you, *carissimo,* now that I am here you must quickly grow well and strong again."

"The shadows, they are very dark."

"The sun shines beyond them."

3

It was not till the eighth of December that the King went out for the first time, and a week later was carried to Mass at the church of les Célestins. On his return Piero found Jules de Sarci waiting in the Entraigues Palace, more like a ghastly painted corpse than he had ever seen him.

"The King will see you when he is rested."

"He is convalescing?"

"But so slowly; everything against him; bad news, black shadows everywhere."

Jules nodded.

"Yes, the Regent is inexorable that he withdraw into Italy at once. He says he is already so ill with the Pope that a little more or less matters naught. The only thing he cares for is to satisfy the Elector, who insists that the base and essential condition of the treaty is: 'Beyond the Alps!'"

"You are but just arrived from Paris? And your sister?"

"It is now only a question of days. But, *mon Prince,* there is one thing I would prepare you for before I go to the King."

Piero looked at him quickly as he continued:

"Mademoiselle Ogilvie is here with my sister, who begged to have her these last few weeks. So Lady Mary let her come, with Marie and a duenna, when I came."

Piero went to the window and stood for a minute looking out into the snowflakes whirling past, then he came back and held out his hand.

"Thank you, and I would there were aught I could do for you in return."

Not till the last day of the old year did Piero see Margaret, when, at the Requiem Mass for Clarice de Sarci, he caught sight of her on the far side of the cathedral nave, her face under the black veil outlined against the black draperies that covered the old grey pillars. Then some movement hid her, and he saw instead Jules de Sarci, his face like a stone grotesque under the powdered curls of his wig.

Outside the *bise* was howling, bringing with it from the eternal snows something drily and bitterly austere, driving the powdery snow before it like men and women helpless before fate. Under the low grey sky the town was pinched and frozen; in the dimness of the nave the only light came from the swaying yellow flames of the wax candles about the bier, with its heavy pall of black

velvet and waving plumes. The terrible, yet splendid, music of the *Dies Irae* had sunk into silence; the legate, his deacon and sub-deacon in their black vestments grew dim behind the clouds of blue smoke as the bier was incensed.

"Dies irae, calamitatis et miseriae, dies magna et amara valde!"

The words rang again in Piero's mind; woe, and misery, and exceeding bitterness—yes, the blackness of farewell, the passing of youth and hope and beauty. For himself and Margaret, renunciation; for the King, exile and the death of hope. Again he stood by the triumphant arch at Avignon and saw the white whirl of dust drift by; so went human hopes and dreams and love. *"Ut pulverem ante faciem venti."*

CHAPTER IX

"BEYOND THE ALPS"

On Twelfth Night the legate gave a fête at the Papal Palace, and the King made his first appearance in public since his illness. He sat on the great chair of State, surmounted by the *baldacchino* and its gold-fringed crimson curtains, the Papal arms emblazoned behind it. Above his flame-coloured coat, gleaming with the stars of all his orders, his face had the transparent, almost iridescent pallor of mother-of-pearl, as if the veil of mortality were worn so thin that the beautiful soul shone through it undimmed.

The day of departure was already fixed for the Jacobite Court, but there was gaiety, jesting and laughter, dancing and music, for though shadows gather ahead, for youth the sunshine of to-day is enough.

Presently the King joined Olive d'Auvergne by the roaring fire of logs on the open hearth.

"I see Mistress Ogilvie is still here, Princess."

"Yes, she came to me after Clarice's death, and I begged her aunt to let me keep her, so that we may make the journey to Paris together next month."

"We shall miss you in Italy."

"Henri insists that his son must be born in the d'Auvergne hotel in Paris, where he and all his fathers were."

"But if it is a daughter?" smiled the King.

"Such a disgrace is unknown in the family," she laughed. "Henri would desert me!"

"It is good to see you so happy."

"Sire, there is nothing in all the world like the love of one man and one woman."

"And children?"

"They are the crown."

She bent forward and touched his arm lightly, her beautiful eyes full of a new and brooding tenderness.

"If life would give you that love and its crown, Sire, I pray that it may."

"That, Princess, is as God wills, but I thank you for your prayer. I have not yet spoken to Mistress Ogilvie since her return to Avignon."

Olive signalled across the hall to Margaret, who was talking to the faithful Pietro Doni; she came to the King and at a gesture from him took Olive's seat.

"You have not yet danced," he said with a smile. "Poor Pietro! If I were able we would lead off together as at the Doni fête."

"Please God I may yet remind your Majesty that you promised me the first minuet at St. James's."

"I am already too far from home, but once in Italy——"

He broke off with a little despairing gesture.

"'Tis but that the night is darkest before dawn."

"Happiness I sometimes think is not for me."

"You have made others happy, Sire. I heard but yesterday from my cousin, Elspeth Forbes, that she and Alan Fraser were to be married on New Year's Day, and she and Alan bade me tell Your Majesty you should ever be remembered by them and their children."

"I am glad, for only too often the fate of my house overshadows not me alone, but those most dear to me."

"If we could do aught to ease your burdens," she said very low; "to lighten your shadows, you know there is not one of us that would not give heart and body to serve you."

He looked at her with eyes that seemed to have grown enormous in the thin face.

"Do you remember that day at Vaucluse, Mistress Margaret? I told you then that your promise was my one earthly star amid the gathering shades."

She was very pale, but her eyes met his steadily.

"My unbounded loyalty and service are yours, Sire, when and how you will."

The musicians had begun a Scotch reel and James Keith, Marischal's younger brother, came up.

"This is my last day of holiday, Sire, for I return to-morrow to my studies in Paris. Will you grant me a favour?"

The King held out his hand with the irresistible Stuart smile.

"Could I refuse you anything, Jamie, my dear? To the half of my kingdom."

"That Mistress Ogilvie will dance this reel with me. We have managed to get two Highland pipers."

The violins and spinet of the local musicians were silenced and the wailing of Highland pipes rose under the vaulted roof of the Papal hall while Keith led out Margaret to her place in an eightsome reel.

The legate sat beside the King, and as the dance finished the King looked up at Piero, who stood beside him.

"Have you your violin, *caro mio?* Then, with Monsignor's permission, will you play the Ogilvie Lament, if Mistress Margaret will sing it?"

Piero's face froze but he nodded, and without a word fetched the Stradivarius. Margaret was on the King's right when he returned, so he stood on his other side and without looking at her began the obbligato. Her voice faltered over the first few notes, then it rang clear and strong.

"It was a' for our rightfu' King
We left fair Scotland's strand . . .
Now a' is done that men can do,
And a' is done in vain . . .
When day is gone and night is come,
An' a' folk bound to sleep,
I'll think on him that's far awa',
The lee-lang night and weep, my dear, the lee-lang night
and weep."

When the last wail of the violin had throbbed into silence there was not a dry eye among the Scottish exiles, the loyal men and women who would never again see the glory of the far-flung heather, hear the music of Highland burns, nor tread the wild free hills of Scotland under their wide arch of low grey sky.

The King looked at Piero, who stood motionless, with his violin still tucked under his chin; the firelight flickered on the great emerald on his left hand and the golden corn-ears of its setting. Then, for one long moment Piero's and Margaret's eyes met in a glance that held all the deathless agony of farewell—and she was gone.

The King stood up.

"Monsignor," he said in a voice that shook a little, "with your leave I will go, but let no one attend me. Père de St. Etienne perhaps will accompany me. When you return, Piero, will you come to my room?"

As the King left the hall followed by the Jesuit he stopped to speak to the Prince d'Auvergne, then the drive through the snowy streets was accomplished in silence, and the King led the way into a small room downstairs.

"You leave for Paris to-morrow, *mon père?*"

"Such are my orders from my superiors. Your Maj-

esty knows that if I could follow the dictates of my own heart I should accompany you to Modena."

"So it is not likely we shall meet again. I think that God must fear any too strong human affections for me, since one by one He takes from me the bodily presence of my friends, if not their hearts."

"You remember what St. Ignatius said, that if God will make us great saints He sends us great sufferings? Perhaps it is thus with you, my son."

"Do you remember, *mon père,* that night at Scoon, when you said to me that one thing only mattered—the entire resignation of our will to God's? Will you remember me daily in your Mass, that I may never falter in my submission, but may succeed in what I now endeavour to do, in making my will as it were a blank sheet of paper for God to write on as He will?"

James watched the tall black figure limp away through the snow, then he went into the church of St. Didier, groped his way through the darkness and knelt before the faint glimmer of the red lamp for a while in silence, till his lips moved in broken, long-familiar words.

"Make bitter every joy that comes not from Thee, impossible every desire that has not Thee for its end, full of delight every labour done for Thee. . . . Give me a heart which no sight or sound may distract from Thee; a loyal and faithful heart which never falters, never falls; a dauntless heart ever ready to renew the battle after every defeat; a free heart, never led away, never enslaved; a true heart, never treading crooked ways."

The King was sitting before the fire in his writing-room, wrapped in the crimson velvet gown trimmed with sable, Griset's head on his knee, when Piero came in.

"I was here before, but François told me you were not yet come."

"Why did you not stay on at the fête?"

"I would rather be with you, *caro mio*. There is something you wanted to say to me?"

"Will you mind if I talk a little about myself?"

"To what else would I rather listen? *Bacco!* It is cold!"

He sat down by the fire and laid his head against the King's knee with a sigh.

"You are tired?" asked James, laying a hand on the shining hair. "You who used never to know weariness nor sickness nor pain—nor sorrow, save for my misfortunes."

"I grow old."

"Then what of me, Piero? In five months I enter upon my thirtieth year, and if I am not the father of a son before I am thirty what dire misfortunes are foretold for my devoted head."

"You must hasten then. 'That thou doest, do quickly.'"

"As his Grace of Mar so delicately puts it: 'It is children we want; the sooner they come the better and their not coming at all would be ruin to us.' He was kind enough to add that: 'an agreeable person is a good deal to be considered,' seeing that I have 'so few things in any way to entertain' myself with."

Piero lifted his head and looked up into the oval face; the nostrils quivered, the sensitive mouth curled in a tragic little smile.

"He's right in that," said Piero bluntly. "You should at least have liberty to choose as the mother of your sons one who will also be friend and companion to you."

"Such women are rare."

"I know of one."

"I also, but that is not what I would say to you."

"You said you would talk to me of yourself, Jacopo, and that is all too rare."

"Of us. Once more, and perhaps not again, of our friendship. In it you have always been the sunshine, I the shadow. You have given all and what have I given in return? Nothing, apart from my love, but a share of my misfortunes. In the shadow of failure I was born; in its shadow I have lived and shall die. The doom of my race, the darkness of my own destiny encloses all who serve me, all whom I would serve. To win or to give success is not in my power; failure walks with me on one side, sorrow on the other. God has called me to renunciation and endurance, not to joy and happiness, to follow Him on the steep and thorny way of suffering."

"It is too hard."

"No, *caro mio,* God is generous. What we renounce in obedience to His Will He repays a thousandfold with joy such as eye hath not seen nor ear heard."

"But in the future you may, nay, you *must,* you *shall* be happy."

"I think I shall always look on earthly happiness through the eyes of others, and perhaps that is the best way."

François came in and murmured something to the King of which Piero only heard the words: "Prince d'Auvergne."

"*Bien,* one moment, François. Piero, will you wait in my bedroom till I call?"

Piero shut the door behind him, and drawing back the curtain, stood looking from the window where the King had stood the night of Louise Granby's death. The bare branches of the trees were outlined in snow; the heavy boughs of firs and pines were bent almost to breaking with their white burdens. The steep roofs, the towers of the cathedral, the great façade of the Papal palace with

its lighted windows showed dark in the queer light reflected from the snow. The sun had set, the waning moon not yet risen behind the arch of steel-grey, snow-laden cloud.

It was less than a year ago since he, Piero d'Este, had ridden into Dundee behind James on his triumphant entry, and that same evening had met and spoken to Margaret. Into that short year had been crowded, it seemed, a whole lifetime of successful achievement, shattered dreams, failures, journeys, intrigues, hate, jealousy and love—and now the end. Yet, come what might, he knew that one thing at least those months had not brought him, regrets or remorse.

He heard the King call, went into the other room and saw Margaret standing very pale and still, the tears running down her face.

James held out his hand and drew Piero to him.

"I said to you a little while ago that I should only see earthly happiness through the eyes of others. If I may see it in the eyes of you two, I shall indeed be happy."

Piero looked from the King to Margaret, who smiled at him through her tears.

"My friends," said James, "am I not right in thinking that for my sake you were both willing to renounce a great love?"

"How did you know?" asked Piero sharply.

James smiled.

"Love is not blind, Piero. When you returned from Paris you were no longer the same. Your friendship, your love for me had not altered nor diminished; it was more perfect. But you were no longer the old Piero. Then, in the hall of the Papal palace, when you stood still holding your violin after the Ogilvie Lament, the firelight caught your ring on your left hand, and I saw that the setting was not grapes but corn-ears, and knew that it was

not your ring but Margaret's. Then I saw you look at her, and she at you, and in that look I read the whole story. And now, if you desire my happiness, as I know you do, both of you, it is within your power to grant it by letting me see yours."

He stood up, took Margaret's right hand in his left and kissed it. Then he laid it in Piero's, and went out, leaving them together.

2

One morning at the end of January the legate married Margaret to Piero in the cathedral, and to their great pride, Marie to Jean. Piero rode straight from the cathedral door north to Orange and over the Mont Cenis Pass to Modena, to prepare for the King, who arrived there with his diminished Court on March 9.

When he had seen the King, who was worn out with the journey of over a month through almost impassable snow and ice, Piero found Margaret.

"There are still two hours of daylight," he said abruptly, "so, if you are not too weary, we will ride home."

As Roxane and the grey walked up the last hill Piero pointed to the castle towering above them, its western front glowing rosy-red in the last rays of the setting sun.

"It is all shut up," he said, "except the one room I have used when I have been here, and my mother's bedroom. Also there are no servants but my old nurse and her husband. You shall make what arrangements you will."

The bare severity of the room where they supped was warmed by great boughs of the earliest mimosa and almond blossom, the golden balls and rosy blooms on their black stems glowing against the faded tapestry. Piero was rather grave and silent, sitting with bent head, so

that the yellow candle light struck copper gleams in his dark hair. His face was smooth and brown again, but the boning was clearer; there was a harder line to the mouth; the aquiline nose was sharper cut, the eyes deeper in their sockets. Margaret, on whom his silence had cast a shadow, as if she sat facing a stranger, looked at him and suddenly knew that in those weeks of torture he had lost something which he would never regain. She felt rising in her a great tide of overwhelming love and pity—that passionate and protective tenderness which is the most enduring and selfless element in a woman's love for a man, the love of the eternal mother in her for the eternal child in him, which lasts immortal and unchanged when the devastating fire of physical passion is burnt out into cold grey ashes. She rose swiftly, went round to him, and caught him in her arms as she had done that day in prison.

He picked up a fold of her grey homespun gown and fingered it.

"You wore this dress that Sunday when you saved my hand and rode to save the King."

"And before that, the first time I saw you, when you rode into Dundee behind the King, and into my heart. Is it not folly of me to remember that and wear it to-night?"

"It is for such folly that I love you. That grey dress is the Scotch in you, but now you are Italian you must have colour."

He went across to a black and gold Spanish cabinet, unlocked it and took out a case.

"My mother wore this the last time I saw her. Also it was Lucrezia Borgia's, like our rings."

He put the great necklace of rubies round and round Margaret's neck, so that it lay in rivers and pools of blood-red light on her white breast and the linen collar of her grey dress.

"Now, before it is quite dark I will show you the view I dreamed of in the snow outside the Seagate of Dundee."

They went through the window and stood by the low balustrade of golden marble, looking out over the terraced gardens, with their straight white paths and fountains casting silver veils of spray between fleeing marble nymphs and swift amorous gods. Beyond the brooding darkness of the stone-pines and the black spearheads of cypresses lay the marshes of the Romagna, where the mist was beginning to rise in white wreaths. Up by this hill-top fortress—battle-scarred and blood-stained, but alive with the passion and tenderness, the love and pride of a thousand years—the cold little breeze blew sharply from the Adriatic as the darkness fell, as the clear sky paled from orange to apricot, from apricot to lemon, from lemon to apple-green, and in the west, under the sharp sickle of the new moon, Venus shone golden, brilliant.

Margaret stirred within Piero's arms and looked up at him.

"How could you bear to leave such a heavenly home?"

"It was not home till you came to it. Also I served the King."

"And will still serve and follow him—so perhaps I shall see Rome."

She whispered then so low that he had to bend his head to hear her.

"But it will always be here, will it not, that our sons are born?"

He took her in his arms and carried her over the threshold into the room. It was dark but for one silver lamp, and the wind which came in with them blew out the flame.

"Give me your hand," he said. "We need no other light but love."

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